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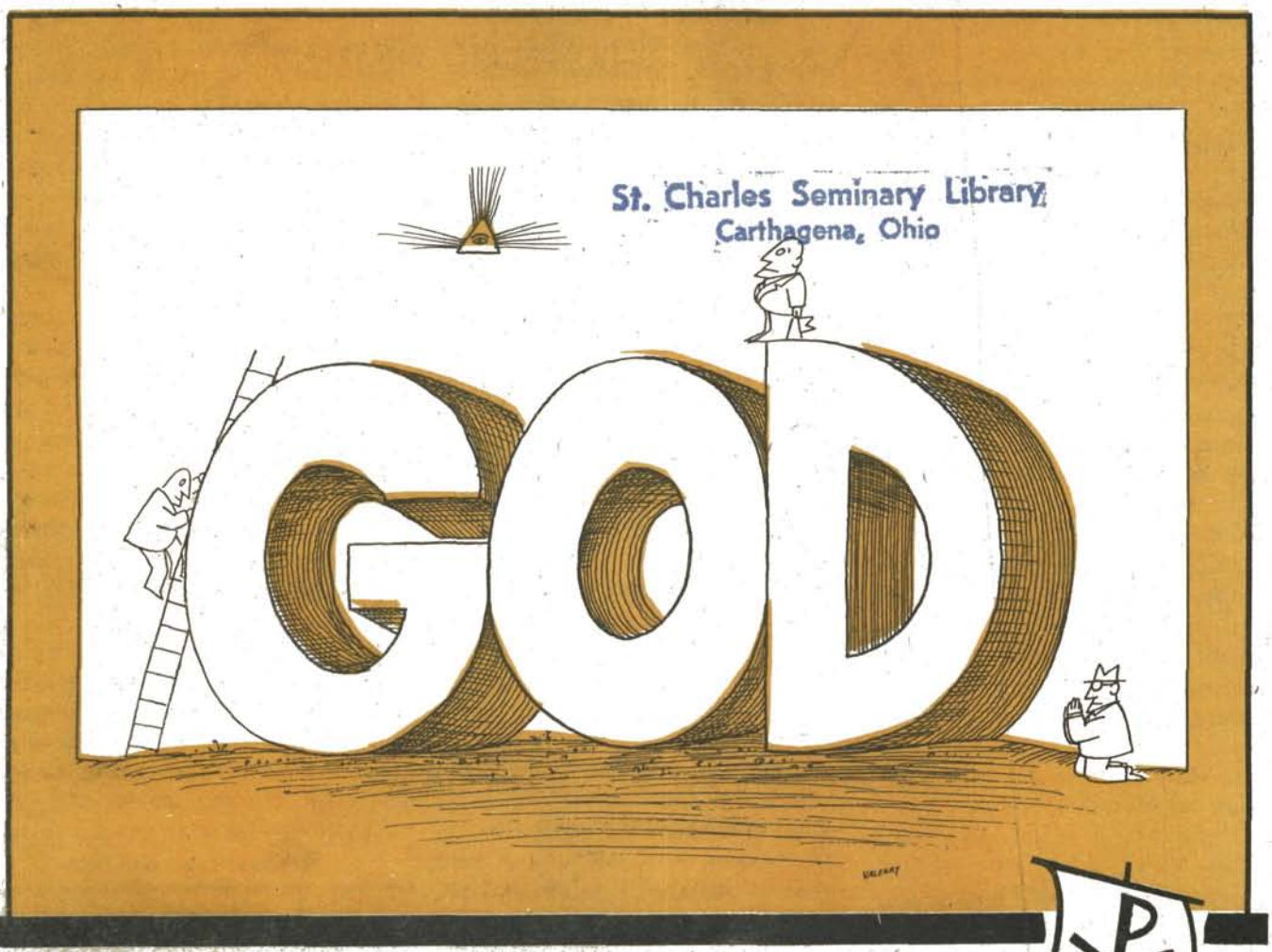
The Editors
ON BORROWED TIME

David R. Carlin, Jr.
CHOICE OF EVILS

$1.25

OCTOBER 4, 1985



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SPIRITUALITY IN FERMENT

Charting a course: from the council to the synod
BERNARD F. SWAIN

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Correspondence

Eliminating torture

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: Rev. Alfred Krass ["A World of Torture," May 3] reported perceptively on the welcome unanimous adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations, on December 10, 1984, of the "Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment." Rev. Krass, as the chairperson of American Christians for the Abolition of Torture, will be working for the ratification of this document by the U.S. Senate.

Prospects for that ratification are not optimistic. The United States Senate has ratified only five of the least controversial of the nineteen major conventions which have emerged from the United Nations. But perhaps even the present Senate will not refuse to make torture an international crime.

Amnesty International, one of the prime movers in the adoption by the United Nations of the Treaty Against Torture, issued in 1984 a searing 263-page report on the horrors and incidence of torture in one-third of the nations of the earth. Not a few of these nations are Catholic — El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, Chile, and others. Not a single report of torture in Nicaguara was recorded!

The Holy See now has formal diplomatic recognition with over 100 nations, the largest number in history. Perhaps Vatican diplomats could use their considerable moral power to help attain Amnesty International's ambition of eliminating torture from the face of the earth by the year 2000.

ROBERT F. DRINAN, S.J.

Letters to limbo

White Plains, N.Y.

To the Editors: On behalf of the members of Group 42 of Amnesty International, U.S.A., I would like to tell you how gratified we were to read the article by Boria Sax ["With Blood and Indelible Ink," May 17] in which Mr. Sax so movingly describes the situation of Gintautas Iesmantas, the imprisoned Lithuanian poet. Iesmantas's case has been assigned to our group as one of our adopted prisoners-of-conscience on whose behalf we write letters to authorities in an attempt to gain their release or, at the very least, to let the persecutors know that someone follows the case.

The free press soldiers on magnificently with frequent articles about Sakharov and other such well-known men and women whose basic human rights are being daily abused, but seldom does a major publication mention by name these lesser known heroes, such as Iesmantas, whose sacrifice for art is just as poignant.

Your readers may be interested to learn that Iesmantas continues to write despite punishment. He defiantly underwent a ten-day hunger strike which was terminated by forced-feeding and instant return to hard labor in below-freezing temperatures. Last July he and his family were interrogated yet again by the KGB; we now fear that he may be sentenced to the ultimate limbo of a "psychiatric ward" at the penal camp. Should any of your readers feel moved to send him a single postcard of encouragement from one lover of literature to another, the address to which we send him mail is:

SSSR
RSFSR Moskva
uvht 5110/0 Vs-389/36
IESMANTAS, Gintautas
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

We do not expect replies to our letters, but the little gleam of hope that "someone out there cares" must be of some comfort to him. Sadly, for the moment, that is all we can do — care.

MARY PENTCHEFF

Ecumenical talk

St. Paul, Minn.

To the Editors: As one of Jim O'Gara's colleagues last year at the Ecumenical Institute at St. John's, I greatly enjoyed his conclusions ["Lenny Bruce Principle," July 12], and would like to add two notes of my own.

In the ecumenical enterprise, worship unites, discussion divides. This is especially the case when the worship focuses on shared prayer and Eucharist, since both can validly carry a diversity of meanings to a diversity of people, while at the same time affirming our shared unity. (Sermons, unless insufferably vague, tend to work the other way; one is implicitly asked to agree or disagree with the points advanced, thus focusing on differences.) Of course there is an important place for reasoned dialogue among Christians of different persuasions, but such discussions as presently conceived, it seems to me, *presupppose* the unity and mutual acceptance which they are trying to create. The growing impatience among Protestant and Catholic laity at the increasingly artificial restrictions on full intercommunion at the parish level is a prophetic sign which our various hierarchies should take more seriously than they do.

Secondly, I suspect there is a deeper reason behind the lack of discussion on changes that might be necessary within Protestant churches that Jim noted. Most Protestants are reasonably satisfied with their current churches, whether they should be or not. If they are unhappy, they easily switch to a more congenial worshipping community. Frequent church-hopping is a symptom of the virtual absence of any top-down teaching authority or discipline, the opposite problem from the occasional authoritarianism which Jim says needs closer constitutional checks on the Catholic side of the house. Whatever their outward form, Protestant churches are radically congregationalist in practice; it is a rare

(Continued on page 540)

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Contents

Volume CXII, Number 17

Correspondence	514
Editorials	515
Choice of evils: *David R. Carlin, Jr.*	518
Reschooling society: *Abigail McCarthy*	519
Spirituality in ferment: *Bernard F. Swain*	521
'Half chick': *E. Castendyk Briefs*	522
Dealing a fair tax reform: *Nancy Amidei*	526
Official harassment, growing solidarity: *Jane Leftwich*	528
Screen: *Tom O'Brien*	530
Music: *Frank McConnell*	532

Books

Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy: *Daniel Callahan*	534
Moses/Dust Tracks on a Road: *Bette S. Weidman*	535
Religious booknotes: *David Toolan*	536
The Travail of Nature: James McCue	538
Easy Essays: *Patrick Jordan*	540

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ON BORROWED TIME

THE UNITED STATES, it was announced in mid-September, has become a debtor nation. Indeed, by 1987, according to one forecast, the U.S. will owe the rest of the world substantially more than currently is owed by Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina combined, with a few other nations thrown in for good measure. By 1990, America's external debt could exceed $1 trillion, and the annual debt service alone would start reaching the dimensions of our recent trade deficits.

Technically, to say that America has become a debtor nation means that the rest of the world owns more of America's assets than Americans own of the rest of the world's. Is that good or bad? It depends. The U.S. was last a debtor nation in 1914 — and had been one during its years of continental expansion in the nineteenth century. In fact, the announcement of America's new debtor status may even be premature, an artifact of misleading statistics. Nonetheless, the trend is clear.

Actually, the U.S. could well be said to be a debtor nation in a less technical sense. Everyone is familiar with figures like the $145 billion trade deficit, now fueling a national debate over protectionism, and the $180 billion annual federal deficit, apparently beyond the power of Congress and the White House to reduce. Then there's the $200-plus billion owed by American farmers (another sum comparable to the combined debts of Brazil and Mexico). The cumulative federal debt will soon approach $2 trillion. Last year the total debt of households, corporations, and all levels of government reached $7.1 trillion. These are overlapping figures, of course, but the point about them is not simply that the sums are astronomical. It is that they have been growing with increasing rapidity — considerably faster than the economy — and constituting a larger and larger proportion of America's GNP.

Perhaps all this is perfectly healthy, an expression of confidence in America's economic future. Borrowings, wisely invested, are essential to growth. The sheer amount of economic activity stimulated by foreign investment may more than compensate for the fact that future interest and profits will be flowing overseas. That's the official optimist's position, professed by President Reagan, among others.

A lot of others doubt whether that mountain of debt really consists of seedcorn planted for the future rather than seedcorn consumed or even squandered. The growth of debt, whether foreign or domestic, may be testimony to the nation's long-term economic prospects, or then again it may simply reflect the lure of the biggest and fastest short-term return, no wiser than the lending recklessly conducted in Latin America a decade ago. Much of the capital inflow from overseas reflects nothing more than the unwillingness of Americans to subtract enough from current consumption through taxes to pay the costs of their government operations. Other debt has been piled up in the course of agricultural overextension, mergermania, aggressive lending in the wake of bank deregulation, speculation in new financial

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instruments as well as high-interest, low-credit-rating "junk" bonds. A worried *Business Week* story on the speculative fevers of our "casino society" summed up the problem: "The collective ability to execute financial transactions has far outpaced the ability to analyze creditworthiness."

Anticipation of government bailouts has often filled in this gap. So far the gauntlet has been successfully run: a Continental Illinois bailed out here, a Financial Corp. of America there. The recurring payments crises of Latin nations have been finessed, at least from the financial system's point of view, if not that of the suffering populations. Now the Farm Credit System is standing in line for a bailout of "multi-billions," says its chief regulator. Probably we'll manage that, too, just as we're absorbing record rates of mortgage delinquencies and business bankruptcies.

But the ominous reality is that this daunting growth of debt and deficit, of delinquency, default, and bankruptcy, has occurred during the upswing of a business cycle. That economic expansion has already surpassed the average length of all previous expansions. What happens when the inevitable downturn arrives — say, a year from now? Having jolted the economy out of recession in 1981-82 by quadrupling the federal deficit, the nation can hardly do so again. A slowdown that piled a further deficit on the current one could produce interest rates sending the economy into coma — and setting off a general debt crisis.

A wise man once defined health as the capacity to adapt to changing conditions, especially adverse ones. In that sense, today's economy is distinctly unhealthy. This debtor nation is like a driven businessman, overweight and overwrought, with high blood pressure and trying to ignore the warning signs — waiting for the attack.

'FEMINISM' & 'CHURCH'

Kudos to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops for stating that "the rights and dignity of women need to be affirmed," in their September 15 statement issued in preparation for the November synod. The bishops should also be congratulated for engaging in months of dialogue with diverse women about the proposed pastoral letter on women in the church, and for taking seriously those who stated unequivocally that a letter on "women" as opposed, say, to one on "patriarchy" would be ill-advised. The specificity of the bishops' references to women's gifts, talents, and leadership abilities — though expressly stopping short of women's ordination — should not be undervalued, coming as it does during a pre-synod period of apprehension.

Along with this affirmation the bishops' report contains a striking statement: "The church needs also to define the appropriate Christian stance toward the secular feminist movement." What does this mean? On the positive side, the statement is certainly an acknowledgment that feminism has gained the serious attention of the bishops of the United States. But does the phrase "secular feminism" have an ominous ring — a hint of a necessarily adversarial relationship between secular feminists and "the church"? After all, history is replete with instances of the church pitting itself blindly against one "secular" movement after another. Historically speaking, the term is loaded.

To define such terms as "the church," "secular feminism," and "Christian stance" is not easy. The words can be both slippery and problematic. For example, among feminists — that is, among those who think that systemic discrimination on account of gender should be rectified — the adjective "secular" is seldom applied. Many feminists take it for granted that a great diversity of viewpoints already exists under the rubric "feminism," and don't feel the need to label them. Which brings up the question of "Christian feminism." There are people who willingly claim both designations, although often reserving the right to specify their own definitions and resenting the use of labels as stereotypes. What are they supposed to be doing while "the church" defines "the appropriate Christian stance toward secular feminism"? We assume that they will be part of "the church" who defines its stance.

Perhaps all this confusion points up the fact that as yet few points of real convergence and divergence have been clearly articulated within feminism. Self-identified Christian feminists, and along with them a whole range of Christian women who have varying degrees of sympathy with feminist perspectives and objectives, have just begun to sketch out a distinctively Christian identity within the larger movement. So far, naturally, they have been preoccupied with defining a stance toward the patriarchal structures of the church. While this work continues to progress, alongside it must develop an identity of Christian feminism *in relation to* secular feminism, which undeniably has its own different history and concerns.

Two examples of the challenge facing Christian feminists to articulate their own identity, being honest about differences and tensions with the larger movement:

- While all feminists acknowledge that institutionalized sex discrimination is evil, Christian feminists, accepting a religious worldview, are specifically concerned with expanding traditionally masculine language and images of God not only to apply a feminist critique to the church, but because God is of primary concern to them. Secular feminists, on the other hand — a dubious term; does it include religious non-Christians along with those who profess no religion? — might find reenvisioning God to be of interest because it is one corrective which would further feminist aims for society. For a Christian, the way God is imaged affects one's subjective, personal faith, the crux of one's worldview; feminist aims for society are seen as one portion of furthering God's justice on earth. Similar differences in viewpoint exist between Christian and secular feminists on other allied issues: church dogma, scriptural interpretation, ethics, and church order.
- In a recent syndicated column, Father Richard McBrien named abortion as one issue "which endangers the entire feminist agenda within the Catholic church." McBrien, who finds no current incompatibility between feminism and Catholicism, warned that feminists who make a pro-choice position

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on abortion the litmus test for admission to the feminist cause would create an incompatibility between feminism and Catholicism. The Catholic church and secular feminism would then represent opposite poles of an issue which each side claims requires the full support of its members. Catholic feminists could be forced to choose sides.

To believe that establishing a Christian feminist identity could further the pluralism and maturity of feminism is an exciting possibility. But Catholic feminists find themselves in the narrow straits of wanting to build solidarity with feminists everywhere — ultimately with women everywhere; at the same time, allying themselves with a church which both nurtures and oppresses them. They are caught between needing to learn from and to trust their own church hierarchy on the one hand; and needing to find support and to communicate with self-identified feminists on the other hand. They want neither to sunder the bonds of sisterhood nor the bonds of Christian community.

How does this tension-filled working out of Christian feminist identity relate to the bishops' admonishment that "the church" needs to define its stance toward secular feminism? "The church" in this case must be primarily Catholic women themselves — feminists among them — who test secular feminist perspectives against their own experiences of womanhood and Christianity.

Yet given the status of women in the universal Catholic church, there is a legitimate fear that the work of "the church" could become a dictate issued from Rome with little awareness of or respect for women's experience. Sensitive pastors might find themselves caught between having to exercise an authoritarian arm — which would only preempt women's task — and learning to trust the gifts, talents, leadership, and decision-making abilities of women which the American bishops now wisely urge the church to recognize.

LOOKING AHEAD

We were invited to attend a symposium at St. Charles Borremeo church in Harlem on September 9, commemorating the first anniversary of the black bishops' of the United States first pastoral letter, "What We Have Seen and Heard" (St. Anthony Messenger Press, $1.95). About 800 people filled the parish hall and church for the day-long conference, and another thousand had to be turned away.

Father Edward Braxton of the University of Chicago's Calvert House presented the opening address. Fr. Braxton has a gift for bringing little-known history to bear on the issues of the day, and his address raised numerous suggestions calculated to further the pastoral's aims. His talk exemplified what the pastoral itself had called the giftedness of Afro-Americans to the church's catholicity. Despite that fact, as his audience itself admitted, not everyone has even read the pastoral, let alone implemented its call for affirmative action programs in all church personnel matters.

An intense liturgy, led by New York's Cardinal John J. O'Connor (host of the symposium) and a dozen bishops from around the country, followed Fr. Braxton's talk. The congregation, directed by Grayson Brown, sang as if it had entered a greater kingdom. The wisdom of liturgical renewal would have found few detractors on that moving occasion.

The seven black bishops present — Moses Anderson of Detroit, Eugene Marino of Washington, Wilton Gregory of Chicago, Harold Perry of New Orleans, James Lyke of Cleveland, John Ricard of Baltimore, and Emerson Moore of New York (all *auxiliaries* it should be noted) — developed themes of the pastoral during their afternoon session. Washington's Marino called racism "a festering boil on the face of the church." He reiterated Paul VI's injunction that today the Gospel can only be proclaimed effectively when bonded with the effort to eradicate structures of oppression and injustice. Poverty, and the social disintegration it breeds, especially in the black communities, was discussed with a clear sense of both policy implications and self-responsibility by Bishop Ricard of Baltimore. (Fr. Braxton had received unified applause when he cited recent figures on the number of black children born out of wedlock, and declared, "Our young people must be effectively taught the importance of growing to maturity, obtaining an education, securing employment, and getting married before they begin their families.")

Yet, when Bishop Perry of New Orleans, the nation's first black bishop, called for leadership training and inclusion on every level for the American Catholic church's 1.3 million blacks, it became clear he felt it necessary to restate again the very goal voiced in the year-old pastoral. Will he be called to do so next year, and the next, and the year after that?

If the dedication, maturity, spiritual insight, and enthusiasm evident at the symposium serve as any indicator of the vitality and gifts of the black Catholic community, it is hard to imagine why the church settles for mere symposiums. It could so much more advantageously implement what the pastoral itself called for: the full acceptance of those needed and timely gifts into the life (and yes, structures) of the church.

THE LONG SEASON

May 1, 1974. Pirate pitcher Dock Ellis hits the first three batters. Ellis intends to fire up his flagging teammates by knocking down the first five Cincinnati Reds to face him. He does not complete the task. His manager yanks him first.

Fans and writers have made much of such exploits (cf. Donald Hall's engaging *Fathers Playing Catch with Sons*, North Point Press, 1985), glorifying them as part of baseball's earthy, alluring aura, indicative of its instinctual origins. Yet today one has to wonder. A recent surge of drug trials involving major league baseball players in several cities indicates the widespread and addictive use of illegal substances in the sport. Players from nearly all twenty-six major league teams have been named as cocaine users in these cases. Dock Ellis now admits he was an addict: "I used everything," he recounts. That May Day 1974 he was fired up not only on baseball fever, but on "amphetamine-like pills" as well.

The United States Drug Enforcement Administration esti-

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mates that up to ninety-five metric tons of cocaine were consumed in the U.S. last year. In dollar amounts that spells mega-billions. The National Institute of Drug Abuse estimates that 22 million Americans have used cocaine. According to a number of major leaguers interviewed by the FBI, 40 to 50 percent of all players use drugs, and 8 to 15 percent are addicted. Commissioner of Baseball Peter Ueberroth believes the problem is greater now than it has ever been. Drug use is the number one problem facing the game, he says, and influence by gamblers and drug dealers is a distinct possibility.

Ueberroth has called for mandatory drug-testing programs for everyone in baseball, players and management alike. But so far the major league players' union has refused on grounds that individual privacy would be violated. The union has opted instead for an ineffective voluntary testing plan. That is not good enough.

Dock Ellis broke his addiction. He now conducts a substance abuse program for a clinic in Beverly Hills. Baseball has exhibited a non-punitive, treatment-oriented approach to drug offenders, and Commissioner Ueberroth promises to continue that policy. But it is up to the players to accept his call for mandatory drug testing or propose an alternative of their own, one with real teeth. It is in their own self-interest. As Mark Liebel, convicted of selling drugs to ballplayers, and now serving a six-year sentence in federal prison, said recently: "Being in prison is tough, believe me, it's really tough. But that cocaine hell was a lot tougher."

Tougher yet is coming to terms with our own national addictiveness. Sports must look at the messages it is sending out: not only from the clubhouse, but on the airwaves, and particularly to young people. For the foreseeable future, such questions cannot be out of season.

Of several minds: *David R. Carlin, Jr.*

CHOICE OF EVILS

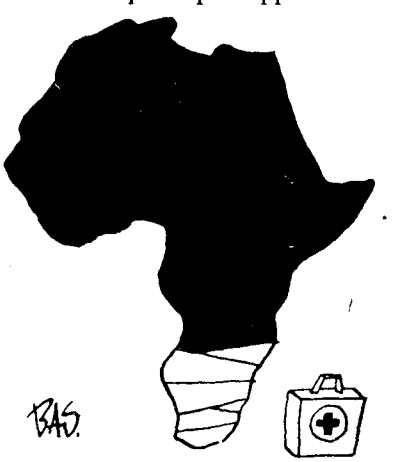
APARTHEID OR TOTALITARIANISM?

THE AMERICAN debate on South Africa, as is usual in such cases, has disclosed more about Americans than about South Africa.

This is especially true of Rev. Jerry Falwell, whose coarse remark about Bishop Tutu being a "phony" and whose preposterous call for increased U.S. investment in South Africa revealed him to be more of (a) a knave or (b) a fool (choose one) than anyone but Norman Lear had suspected. Falwell only made matters worse by his apology for the "phony" remark, explaining, in effect, that he didn't consider Tutu a phony *in toto* but only insofar as he pretended to speak for all blacks in South Africa. But why stop there? The logic-chopping Rev. Falwell could have distinguished still further and explained — once it had been pointed out that Bishop Tutu never did pretend to speak for *all* black South Africans — that his "phony" remark referred to an empty class ("Tutu insofar as he pretended to speak, etc.") and therefore didn't refer to Tutu at all.

President Reagan did only slightly better than Falwell — or rather, he did much worse, since we expect higher levels of good judgment from the president of the United States than from the pastor of a church, even a widely televised church, in Lynchburg, Virginia. In early September the president recanted his late August observation that South Africa had "eliminated the segregation that we once had in our own country." While it was nice to have the recantation, it was chilling to realize that at least until August 1985, more than four-and-a-half years into his presidency, Mr. Reagan had remained ignorant of the basic social facts in a country so critical to U.S. interests.

When the principal opposition to strong American pressure on South Africa is coming from the Falwell-Reagan school of thought — a school of thought whose distinctive characteristic is that it is devoid of thought (reminiscent of the Sea of Tranquillity, a sea devoid of water) — it seems hardly worth the trouble to respond to arguments supportive of the South African regime and its "reform" efforts. But at least one argument — which is sometimes, though not often, offered in good faith — is worth responding to.



"Why South Africa?" it is asked. "If we're so concerned — especially the liberals among us — about freedom and democracy and human rights, why do we put pressure only on South Africa? Why not go after the Soviet Union and other Communist countries as well? Such hypocrisy!"

The easy answer is that the U.S. has regularly brought pressure to bear on Communist countries, not only by being armed to the teeth against them since the late 1940s, but by a variety of economic sanctions as well: the long-standing prohibition on trade with Cuba, the more recent one on trade with Nicaragua, trade restrictions with Poland, the grain embargo (imposed by Carter, lifted by the fervently anti-Communist Reagan) on the Soviet Union, etc., etc.

But a better response is needed. For the truth is that in important respects we really are more serious in our opposition to the South African regime — at least the liberals among us — than we are in our opposition to Communist regimes.

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How can this be justified?

To begin with, it may as well be acknowledged that Communist totalitarianism, at least in the long run, is a greater political evil than apartheid. Predicting the future is a notoriously risky business, but it appears that the days of institutionalized racism are numbered, while totalitarianism, by contrast, seems to have a long and vigorous life in front of it. Racism is a crime of humanity's past, clinging to a dwindling life in the present. It has been a vicious side effect of the great era of European expansion and imperialism, which began in the late fifteenth century and is dying out in the twentieth. Totalitarianism, on the other hand, is a crime of humanity's present and future, still very much in the prime of life.

This being granted, there nonetheless remain very good reasons for Americans to get themselves worked up about South Africa and apartheid.

First, *moral consensus*. Like the mills of God, the collective conscience of humanity advances slowly. Racism and totalitarianism are both no doubt exceedingly wicked, perhaps even equally wicked, when viewed under the aspect of eternity. But when viewed in the dim light of the late twentieth century, racism looks wrong to nearly everybody (except the purblind National Party of South Africa), while the evil of totalitarianism remains in dispute. Let those of us who live in liberal societies deplore, then, the lack of moral insight exhibited by the practitioners and friends of totalitarianism; but as we wait for their small supply of light to increase, let us join them in eradicating the evil we agree upon. Constitutionally established racism exists nowhere in the world except in South Africa, and the day of its destruction will be a landmark event in the history of humanity's slow and arduous moral progress.

Second, *practicality*. While it would be an exceedingly fine thing to eliminate totalitarianism from the world, this is not an immediately practical project. Nor may it become so for centuries yet. But the defeat of apartheid in the relatively near term is definitely a practical goal. To concentrate our energies on feasible, as opposed to quixotic, aims is not political hypocrisy. It is the essence of political wisdom.

Third, *domestic racial justice*. For obvious historical reasons, black Americans strongly identify with the plight of South African blacks. Just as support for Israel is a way of expressing solidarity with Jewish Americans, so doing battle against apartheid is a way of demonstrating solidarity with black Americans. Anti-apartheidism thus becomes an ingredient in American racial justice.

Fourth, *prestige and influence*. To the degree the Reagan administration is perceived — accurately perceived, one regrets to say — as being "soft" on apartheid, U.S. prestige and influence in the world suffer. This is especially so in third-world countries, usually populated by "persons of color" and always having behind them the long and painful experience of being humiliated underdogs. Great powers do not live by armaments alone. If the U.S., in its protracted struggle against totalitarianism, hopes eventually to win the hearts and minds of the world to liberal democracy, we had better demonstrate, at a minimum, that we are sensitive to the fact that the third world still smarts under centuries of Western injuries and insults. South Africa is a critical test case.

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

Of several minds: *Abigail McCarthy*

RESCHOOLING SOCIETY

REGIONAL EFFORTS SPELL SUCCESS

IN TIMES of great change and individual stress, people tend to feel that their institutions have failed them. The home, the church, the school, and of course, the government, are not what they should be. We have been left orphaned and unprotected. That institutions too have been assaulted with the same rapid and unforeseen change does not seem to matter.

Look at the charges leveled at the public elementary and secondary schools this year (and, to some extent, at the parochial schools as well). Before stepping down as Secretary of Education, Terrel Bell said unequivocally in a final interview, which appeared in *U.S. News and World Report*, that Japanese schools were far superior to American schools in very specific ways:

> The Japanese educational system is superior to ours . . . [in] academic achievement in such areas as literacy and command of mathematics and science . . . There is much more emphasis on order and discipline . . . Japanese students must master a second language . . . There is [a] single national curriculum . . . students grow up learning to perform at the outer limit of their ability, which washes over into the work place after they graduate.

In drawing the comparison he was only echoing the alarm sounded in 1983 ("A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform") by a federally funded commission. The commission described schools nationwide as in desperate need of better curriculums and better teachers.

As the opening of this school year neared, Bell's successor, Secretary William J. Bennett, attacked the curriculum once again in a speech to the Knights of Columbus in August. He faulted the schools for the exclusion of religion as a subject, and, consequently, of "our Judeo-Christian heritage." He made it clear that, in his opinion, our history and its basic documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are either not taught at all or taught in such a way that our shared values are not made explicit. As the school year opened he sought to dramatize the need of good teaching by highly publicized visits to

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eight schools around the country. (In these visits, incidentally, in which he took over classrooms to show *what* should be taught and *how* it should be taught, he proved himself a skillful teacher worthy of emulation in method, at least.)

The number two man in the Department of Education, Undersecretary Gary Bauer, carried the attack on the schools farther in a speech in which he laid much of the blame for the breakdown of morals in society and the rise of drug abuse, teenage alcoholism, and suicide on the schools and their "value-neutral" curriculums.

(This criticism is more contemporary and somewhat different in detail, but we have to admit it is very like the long-continuing warning about public education and its evils — a warning which used to be sounded from Catholic pulpits as the day for school registration neared. Fundamentalist Protestants have, of late, made this attack their own in an even more organized and intense way.)

Bauer was in a sense only repeating President Reagan's thesis in a speech on education last February.The president said that students should not only learn basic subjects but basic values. "We must teach the importance of justice, equality, religion, liberty, and standards of right and wrong."

If educators were not already reeling from the load of responsibility thrust on them by government leaders, they must have been so when business leaders joined the discussion in mid-September. The New York-based Committee for Economic Development issued a report which said that an alarming number of children leave school without learning the discipline and work habits necessary for success in the marketplace, and also without a sufficient command of English to communicate effectively in either writing or speech which is required for achievement in the business world. The implication is clear: with such an ill-equipped work force America's position in the world economy is endangered.

It is no wonder that some educators feel as does the teacher who wrote to a major newspaper:

> Americans have always expected too much of their public schools. Conveniently, they have forgotten that the school ranks third behind the family and the church as a socializing institution . . . In the attempt to find a scapegoat for society's failures, we have opted once again to seize on the schools as the culprit. American society refuses to see the ugliness that exists in our schools as a reflection of the ugliness that exists in society.
>
> (Edwin Xavier Travers to the *Washington Post.)*

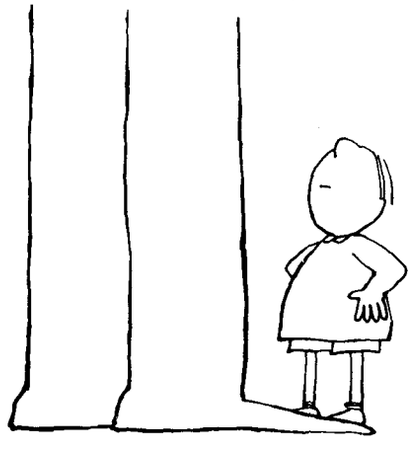
But we must start somewhere in an attempt to untangle "the convoluted state in which society finds itself." The schools may not be the cause of that state but they may be the way out. One might say that American public education suffers now from the successes of its past.

Shorn of specifics, what are alarmed Americans asking for?

For the transmission of values which will create community.

For the transmission of knowledge and skills necessary to public and economic citizenship.

In the past the American schools have been extraordinarily successful in doing just those very things. It is a truism that the function of the schools is to educate, not to change society. Yet the truth is that in America the schools have often shaped society. Again and again, it was through the schools that wave after wave of almost illiterate and impoverished immigrants entered the urban mainstream. Right now the schools, although weakened by poor financing and poor community support, are doing the same thing for a diverse mix of third-world refugees and Asians with astonishing success. In our history schools became the center for pioneer and rural communities of the semi-isolated and uprooted who came to a new land or a new part of the country. This function of the school becomes apparent wherever new influxes occur — around new oil fields, new port facilities, newly developed areas of industrial growth.



Granted that the transmission of values must be values agreed on, it is here that many of the critics can be faulted. Their aim seems often to be the imposition of values. (In President Reagan's list, for example, we can certainly question whether the concept of religion *per se* is as clear and generally understood as are the concepts of justice, equality, and liberty.) Perhaps to have agreement, reform and improvement must be regional. For success is coming to the schools once again — and it is coming regionally.

In the South, in state after state, legislatures and city governments have concentrated on improving the schools. Tests for teacher certification are required, as are competency tests for current teachers. Merit pay for teachers is being tried. More money has been allocated for teachers' salaries and for textbooks and laboratory materials. As a result, test scores have soared. In one county of South Carolina, for example, for the first time in its history grade school students scored above the national average in every subject area; the number of second-year high school students above the national average rose from 40 to 51 percent.

The problems of the disadvantaged are yielding to regional attack, too. In the counties of Maryland and Virginia near Washington, D.C., where black students fell anywhere from 20 to 37 percentile points behind whites, there have been successes as a result of concentrated effort. Black eighth graders have been raised from the thirtieth to the fortieth percentile in reading, and from the fifty-second to the sixtieth in mathematics.

Given help, direction, resources, and the right teachers, the schools *can* do wonders and start us on our way.

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

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Spirituality in ferment

BERNARD F. SWAIN

ANY ATTEMPT to trace the course of Catholic spirituality and prayer in the wake of Vatican II is confronted by a troubling paradox. On the one hand, the council did not legislate a consistent program of reforms for spiritual life; no council document makes spirituality its primary focus. On the other hand, the council's impact has profoundly altered Catholic prayer and spiritual life over the last twenty years. We must respect this paradox and the tension it creates: since many conciliar documents addressed issues which produced deep yet indirect effects on Catholic spirituality, it is important to note these effects and assess their current status and significance. But since these effects were not the intentional design of a single document, we should not be surprised if the overall impact is inconsistent, even piecemeal.

More than anything else, it is the *ecclesiology* of Vatican II that has shaped our spirituality in the last generation. The notion of church as "people of God" (*Lumen Gentium*, 2) and as "priestly people," along with the "universal call to holiness" (*Lumen Gentium*, 5), created the strong sense that the spiritual life was no longer to be regarded as the particular responsibility of a small minority of full-time contemplatives, praying on behalf of everyone else. Spirituality was to be understood, rather, as a universal responsibility flowing from the baptismal and sacramental life of all Catholics: "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society" (*Lumen Gentium*, 40).

These ideas of church had the related effect of altering the *focus* of Catholic spirituality. Rather than centering the spiritual life on a particular discipline, lifestyle, or devotional pattern specific to certain religious communities, the council centered spirituality on the sacraments themselves — on liturgy as prayer — and therefore on a pattern of behavior which is, in principle at least, accessible to all Catholics. In the council's view, the primary institutional locus of spiritual life is the parish and even the world, not the monastery.

Furthermore, this ecclesiology suggested that the key context for spiritual life is not a private relationship — "Jesus and me" — but the worshipping community itself: "It is especially in the sacred liturgy that our union with the heavenly church is realized" (*Lumen Gentium*, 50). Thus prayer and spirituality are intrinsically public and communitarian. The church is not merely an institutional structure whose sacraments mediate an individual's relationship with God, but a people whose sharing of the sacraments makes it (and therefore its members) graced, priestly, holy, and thus in touch with God.

This aspect of the council's ecclesiology has had the practical effect of making Catholic liturgical and sacramental life not only the central focus but, for many Catholics, the exclusive focus of their prayer and spirituality. In this light, the documents on liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963) and Sacred Scripture (*Dei Verbum*, 1965), along with their implementation, served to facilitate this change of focus by rendering the sacramental signs and rituals more intelligible, more biblically oriented, and more communitarian. To a great extent, then, the council's success in renewing Catholic spiritual life can be measured by its success at liturgical reform.

SINCE LAST June *Commonweal* has been publishing a series of articles in anticipation of next November's extraordinary synod. Each article has focused on one of the central questions raised by Vatican II but still sharply dividing Catholic opinion two decades later. Previous contributors were Gregory Baum writing on the council's optimistic stance toward the world, Avery Dulles on authority, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza on women in the church, Joseph A. Komonchak on doctrine, and Lisa Sowle Cahill on morality. Coming in the next issue: a wide range of lay Catholics discuss the council's impact.

THE EDITORS

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For some Catholics, though, this success has involved a series of tradeoffs. For every gain in intelligibility, biblical orientation, or community participation accomplished by liturgical reform, they perceive a loss in universality, in aesthetic beauty, in a sense of mystery. For every evidence that our weddings, baptisms, and funerals are more pastorally effective than before the reforms, alert observers can offer equally persuasive evidence that church attendance, penance, and confirmation are in decline.

To my mind, any adequate understanding of these concerns must take the long historical view of the council's work. Vatican II did not promote a new style of liturgical and sacramental life on dogmatic or aesthetic grounds (as if, for example, there were something wrong with the Latin texts, or no beauty in Gregorian chant, or anything intrinsically inappropriate with incense and bells). The council's intentions were, rather, historical: to chart a course for the survival of the Christian church in a post-Christian culture. If the old ways had to be altered it was not because they were inherently flawed but because they had become ill-suited to the needs of the modern world. They were the products of the Christendom era, when the church dominated the secular and social as well as the religious dimensions of people's lives — an era rapidly passing away if not already gone. The new styles should be regarded not as better or worse, but simply as more timely (particularly if they retrieved older traditions from the early church, which first learned to thrive and grow in a pre-Christian culture more like our own time than Christendom was). So if people feel a lack of mystery in current liturgy, for example, the solution is not to reinstall the customs of Catholic Christendom (which by now would risk conveying a *false* sense of mystery simply because they are so alien to us); the solution is to develop our new styles so that they convey a sense of the mysterious, the numinous, the transcendent for twentieth-century people just as effectively as the styles of the Renaissance and medieval church did for the people of their time.

In this historical view, the challenge to refocus the spiritual life on liturgy and sacraments is obviously the work of more than twenty years. This realization sheds light as well on people's concerns about quality and beauty. If people feel plagued by "crummy music" at folk Masses, for example, they should note that the style of folk liturgy (unlike Gregorian or Gothic liturgy or the liturgical music of Palestrina, Haydn, or Mozart) is a *popular* style. This brings the advantage of music which is more accessible to people, and thus invites their participation as a community, in line with the council's ecclesiology. But it also brings the disadvantage of *any* popular art: inconsistent quality (as Dwight Macdonald once observed of popular art: "Eighty percent of anything will be junk"). The only test for quality in popular art is the test of time. The first generation since the council has already sorted its way through a great many transitional experiments, separating chaff from wheat. The next generation will reap the benefits.

In this broad historical sense, then, the development of our sacramental life since the council is on course, but the destination (a sacramental system capable of simultaneously conveying community and mystery, for example) remains ahead of us.

THIS STRESS on liturgy and sacrament does not exhaust, however, the ecclesiological shift of spirituality accomplished by Vatican II. Equally seminal was the notion of the church as a "pilgrim people" (*Lumen Gentium,* 48):

> The renewal of the world is irrevocably under way. . . . However, until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells (cf. 2 Pet. 3:13), the pilgrim church, in its sacraments and institutions, which belong to the present age, carries the mark of this world which will pass, and she herself takes her place among the creatures which groan and travail yet and await the revelation of the children of God (cf.Rom. 8:19-22).

This image of the church as unfinished, as *en route*, struck two resonant chords in contemporary American culture. The first was a sense, largely rooted in the American religious heritage, of history as the pursuit and exploration of new frontiers — especially spiritual frontiers. In the council's wake, this chord struck American Catholics with a new sense of the spiritual life of the church as open, subject to discovery,

'HALF CHICK'

A FABLE FOR BEDE GRIFFITHS & SACCIDANANDA ASHRAM

PERCHED ON A SPIRE to point the wind, Half Chick pensively revolved on his one foot and spread his glittering wing as far as he could. It was March, and José had just ventured up the steeple with brush and cup of gold paint so that San Pedro's portending rooster would be in fine feather for the coming holy days.

Half Chick was too miserable to be appreciative. Not that he was lonely — though he would have been delighted to scratch and fluff in the ochre dust below, or ride hens with other young cocks, all clearly out of the question. His foot was soldered to a brass ball which topped a rod greased and inserted in the spire. This allowed him to feel out the winds and indicate to the world which way they were blowing. Half Chick was proud of his high office, and philosophic about the restrictions of his range, a ten-inch circle. What had robbed him of his night's sleep and usual morning joyousness was an entirely different matter.

From his vantage point, Half Chick had long enjoyed a broad and lively panorama of village life. But until yesterday, he had never noticed how many important things come in pairs. Right foot-left foot. Right wing-left wing.

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change, and growth. The second chord was the secular tide of the "human potential" movement of the 1970s. Faced with the growing narcissism of the "me decade," many Catholics decided, logically enough, to transcend the preoccupation with self by engaging in an inward exploration of "my journey" toward God.

The combined effect of these two chords has been to make spirituality a hot item in American Catholicism for more than ten years. Thomas Merton's engaged spirituality, contemplating an active world, is even more popular now than it was during his lifetime as a best-selling writer. Just when preached retreats seemed ready to die out in the early 1970s, directed one-on-one retreats (especially along the lines of Ignatian spirituality) exploded into a whole new movement — soon followed by a bewildering array of retreat programs (Search, Cursillo, Better World, Marriage Encounter, etc.) linked only by a common focus on spiritual conversion, transformation, and growth. Lay Catholics who once sought out confessors now seek instead a spiritual director (hitherto available only to seminarians and religious). Spiritual journal-keeping has become as popular as scapulars once were. Reflection and support groups multiply as people share their journeys. Henri Nouwen has become a superstar of spirituality (even during his recent tenure at Harvard, his classes and retreats were consistently overenrolled). The contemporary hunger for inner awareness and wholeness born in the 1970s has thus proved a powerful ally for the council's impetus to view the spiritual life, not as a polished cyclic routine, but as a pilgrimage.

But this alliance raises as many problems as prospects. The emphasis on personal journey, combined with the universal call to holiness, leads many to believe, rightly, that spiritual growth is for everybody, not just for contemplatives. And certainly Catholicism, among all religious traditions, is blessed with a wealth of models for the spiritual life and prayer (to which the hunger of Harvard Protestants for Catholic spirituality attests). The problem is that nearly all of these models emerged from, and were built upon, the disciplines of celibacy and community, and do not translate easily or well into the ordinary experience of laypeople. Practically speaking, the success of these models depends on people being: rested; somewhat free from concerns about survival and material security; separated from the tensions and energies of multigenerational family life; undistracted by the drives and demands of sexual partnership; unencumbered by the responsibilities of spouse and children. In short, these models assume and require a life of relative peace and quiet, of security and serenity whereas for most lay people peace, quiet, security, and serenity are the products, not the premise, of spiritual

Right side of the brain-left side. What about him? He had paid scant attention to his nickname. Suddenly its dreadful meaning froze him in his circuit as if the winds, down to the slightest breeze, had died: he, Half Chick, was only half there!

Despite his obvious limitations, Half Chick was no fool. He had seen a lot of history and heard a great deal more. He recalled being cast in the late Renaissance, a modest exemplar of the new technology, and a few dozen years later, gilded and brightly in place for the blessing of a little baroque church, becoming a permanent fixture of Valverde del Rio. At the fiesta that followed the ceremonies, he was a sensation, his silhouette sedately revolving against the sky.

Half Chick realized that his deformity was nothing innate. He knew that originally and deep into the Middle Ages what he stood for had been whole. How it had later become so one-sided as to conceive of him in such half terms he could not imagine, but he was convinced that somewhere his missing foot, wing, side of the brain waited to return to him.

For decades, Half Chick dreamt of wholeness. But as the years crawled past, sharpening rather than rounding his ever more embarrassing lopsidedness, he grew restive. His sleep turned fitful and was streaked with eerie or angry dreams.

One midnight, beside himself, Half Chick dreamt he clanged his wing on the roof of Saint Peter's in Rome, shrieking at the top of his lung, "Two wings, TWO!" over and over, until the great bronze statue of the Fisherman with the worn-shiny toe rose from his seat to investigate. Shoving aside a heavy leather curtain and unlocking the bronze door, Peter emerged into the chilly moonlight. By now, an exhausted Half Chick was clinging to the stone curls of a saint on the portico roof. Fixing Peter with a red eye, he wheezed, "Two wings, two — where's my other?"

Peter sensed the pain behind his visitor's lack of manners. Easily upset by the voice of any rooster, he was stunned by the unmistakable tone of accusal. He blessed Half Chick and rushed back to his chair to think.

Half Chick woke excited and comforted by the old saint's consternation. He knew from history that whenever Peter was properly shamed, sooner of later he did something about it. Just wait, he told himself, somewhere what's missing will be found.

A predawn breeze swung Half Chick gently around to the East. He drew a deep breath, rose on tiptoe and spread his flittering wing as far as he could. "Ahaaaaaaaaaa," he crowed in his best trombone, "East. East-West. South-North. Takes them all for a world to be round. I ought to know!" And revolving confidently towards morning, Half Chick settled down to what he admitted would be a longish wait.

E. CASTENDYK BRIEFS

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growth. These are the things they seek to find inside themselves in prayer, not something their daily existence already provides as a starting point for prayer.

Many lay people who seek to practice Ignatian exercises or to pray the Office trouble themselves and their spiritual directors with their lack of success. Single Catholics lack the support that religious community provides, while those living in families — particularly parents — know firsthand that family life offers as much distraction as discipline.

The council itself recognized the laity's need for a distinctive spirituality (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4). The Orthodox priest Anthony Bloom acknowledged the same need in his *Beginning to Pray* by suggesting that lay people set an alarm clock to a surprise setting so that when it sounded they could practice putting aside five minutes at random for quiet reflection. One former priest, now a husband and father, overheard lay people mention the need for a distinctively lay model of spirituality and said, "I could use some help with that, too!" Authors such as Dolores Leckey and Ernest Boyer have begun to experiment with such new models, whether by adapting traditional (e.g. Benedictine) spirituality, or by creating new forms. Here again the current state is one of creative tension: in the midst of the explosive interest in a more universal practice of spirituality and prayer, there emerges an impatient frustration at how much work remains to be done.

I should note that in my experience as trainer and consultant to clergy I have observed that for many diocesan clergy this problem is equally acute, since religious models of spirituality are often not successful in the context of rectory life (especially if the rectory now houses only one priest). Thus, many clergy as well as lay people seek alternative models, yet to be developed.

Moreover, the inadaptability of religious community models of spirituality is rooted in a deeper, more historical reality: the ecclesiastical structure of religious life has allowed some religious communities to sustain an integration of workplace, living space, social relations, and worship well into a modern age in which such integration is virtually unknown. Modern lay people, by contrast, generally experience a distressing degree of fragmentation between work, family, worship, and social life which makes the development of an integrating spirituality more urgent and more difficult.

For all these reasons, the more universal stress on spiritual development promoted by the council remains an unfinished agenda.

COINCIDING WITH rising interest in spiritual development has been a similar interest in lay ministry. Prompted by the council's decree on the apostolate of the laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10): "the laity have an active part of their own in the life and action of the church"), lay people have assumed more prominent roles, both as volunteers and as professionals, in religious education, campus ministry, counseling, family and social ministry, and music and liturgy.

This movement toward lay ministry has raised a new question in schools and training programs across the country: "what kind of spiritual formation process can provide an adequate foundation for these new lay roles?" In the last ten years, American bishops in particular have been highly vocal about the need for the "formation" of people training for lay ministry. Lay people in training want such formation themselves. Yet there emerges again a concern about the appropriateness of traditional models.

The traditional models of spiritual formation served two functions. First, especially in religious communities, they created a sense of belonging to a particular community with a particular identity — as Jesuit, Benedictine, Franciscan, etc. Second, they developed a sense of loyalty to the institutional church and specifically to one's superior (for diocesan clergy: the bishop).

Such models are of questionable value to lay ministers, who generally do not belong to religious communities, and whose institutional loyalty depends more on the sacramental bonds of baptism, confirmation, and (for some) matrimony than on the responsibilities incurred by orders or religious vows. The fact is that professional lay ministers occupy a new role in the church, for which the old role-models offer little relevance. Clearly a sense of community, belonging, support, and identity are critical to the spirituality lay people hunger for and need, and the urgent need for a formation process that can provide these is equally clear. But in the twenty years since Vatican II the new models required to create such a process have not yet been established.

THE ISSUE of formation in ministry is the concern of a relative minority of lay people. The much wider concern, especially in parishes, regards the impact of the council's shift in spirituality on the devotional life of American Catholics in general. In my work in parish renewal over the last ten years, I have observed the issue of popular devotions raised by group after group, in parish after parish, particularly among those of middle age or older who remember devotional patterns dominated by seasonal feasts, by sacramentals, by non-liturgical ceremonies (Benediction, novenas, throat blessings, forty hours devotions, etc.), by the cult of saints, and especially by the cult of Mary. As I have noted above, Vatican II promulgated no systematic reform of these devotions (though it suggested that a life modeled on the saints was more important than devotional acts — *Lumen Gentium*, 51) but shifted the emphasis with a new ecclesiology and the related stress on sacraments and Scripture. The effect in American parish life has been far-reaching, nonetheless: namely, the *de facto* devaluing and even discrediting of many previously popular devotions. The relatively less central position of Mary in the documents (at the end of *Lumen Gentium* instead of in a separate document) favored the decline of popular dependence on Marian devotions, such as May processions and the rosary. The emphasis on liturgy, community, sacraments, and Scripture further undermined support for private, non-sacramental practices (thus the rosary at Mass was discredited as non-liturgical, while missal reading was discouraged as non-communitarian). The rapid success of the Charismatic Re-

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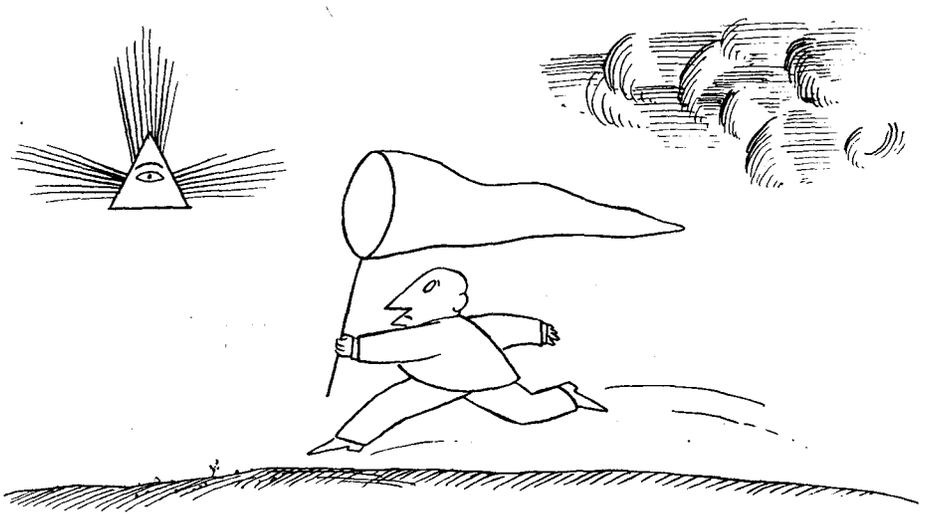
newal, of course, provided an important outlet for much of the devotional fervor of millions of American Catholics, but we should not regard this as a true alternative to popular devotions, for two reasons: First, many were attracted to charismatic prayer groups as much by their strong sense of community as by their devotional qualities. (In this respect, charismatic groups often reflected the council's spirituality better than local parishes.) Second, the high level of turnover in most charismatic groups suggests that for many the prayer group is not a permanent place of devotion but a way-station on one's spiritual journey.

The net result of the devaluing and discrediting of older popular devotions in the absence of any conciliar reforms — a result not intended but nonetheless effected by Vatican II — is a kind of vacuum in the devotional life of most parish communities and families. Some will argue, in favor of this vacuum, that the sacraments are (or should be) sufficient focus for Catholic spiritual life. But the fact is that the decline in popular devotions leads to deeper effects than a mere shift in the schedule of parish activities from devotions to liturgies. For the practical reality touched by this shift is the threat all these changes in spiritual life pose to the future of American Catholicism as a distinctive way of life.

All of us brought up before the council can remember how specific one's identity as Catholic could become in the preconciliar style of Catholic living. I think of the train I ride to work each day through one of Boston's Irish Catholic neighborhoods. En route the train passes the site of St. Ambrose Church, and each time the older Catholic passengers identity themselves by tipping their hats or marking the cross on their foreheads. I found this remarkable enough in the past, when people gestured even with their backs to the church, reading the morning paper. But the depth of this habit became truly clear when, two years ago, the church burnt down. There now remains only a flat plot of earth. Yet people passing by train continue to pay their respects — out of devotion, and out of habit.

To me this symbolizes both the great virtue and the great defect of the old devotional life. The empty lot suggests how hollow such rote performance can become, until it signifies an intention the believer no longer has, an attention the believer no longer gives, and even addresses a reality which is no longer present. Yet there was virtue as well in such devotional habits. (I picture my grandparents, kneeling nightly on the front hall floor before a votive-lit Virgin to recite the radio rosary with Cardinal Cushing.) For these habits accumulated many of the small details of daily life into a pattern of behavior that linked the person one was in church and sacraments with the person one was in the rest of one's life. They helped resist the very dichotomy between church and world that the council observed, lamented, and sought to redress as its major task. They offered the promise of an integrated way of life in a rapidly fragmenting world. Much of this, of course, was accomplished blindly, by rote, and especially by a system of obligation that depended on motivating people with fear and guilt; and therefore much of its benefit was lost on its own practitioners. Moreover, the devotional patterns themselves often reflected an indifference or even hostility to modern life that neutralized their integrating potential.

Two things seem clear. First, the old devotions will not do. Second, their pastoral function may well be indispensable to Catholicism as a way of life: that function must be retrieved, although in some new form. Here is an important focus for much of the ongoing work in parish renewal: to develop new habits of devotional life for parish groups and families — habits that are less cyclic, less rote, less dependent on obligation but more related to liturgy, sacraments, and Scripture, more open to the experience of modern life and to the experience of church as community and pilgrim. So Catholics in parishes across America struggle to learn how to pray with Scripture, to join with others in daily prayer, to practice the "centering prayer" popularized by Thomas Merton and the Trappists of St. Joseph Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts. So parishes and families work to retrieve the long-neglected seasons of Advent and Pentecost. So programs like Renew in Newark and The Paulist Project in Boston assist parishes in developing small faith-sharing groups and in introducing new forms of spirituality into the existing routines of parish life. So the emerging RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) challenges parishes everywhere to retrieve the older devotional rhythms reflected in the movement from initiation, to conversion, to transformation and renewal.



In parish devotions as in other aspects of spirituality, the course may be straight but the journey is not yet finished. The generation since Vatican II has witnessed an extraordinary transformation of the church's prayer and spiritual life, but the council's work — from its first vision of a renewed church to its final completion in our parishes—demands more than one generation. We must go on.

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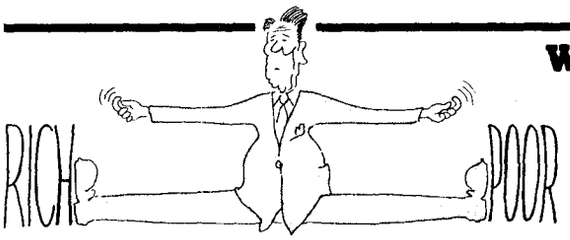

Dealing a fair tax reform

NANCY AMIDEI

PRESIDENT Reagan came back from his California ranch eager to do battle against a tax code he describes as "like a daily mugging." And while not everyone would agree with either his description of the problem or the solution, on one point there is broad agreement: the present tax code is patently unfair to poor people. Neither the president nor the Congress takes any responsibility for how that came to be, but having both acknowledge the problem is worth something — provided they're also prepared to act.

Americans who take the low-paying, no-fringe jobs that nobody else wants were left out in 1981 when Congress happily gave tax breaks to virtually everybody else. This year, although poor people pay federal, state, and local taxes at an effective tax rate nearly equal to the richest segment of the population (22 percent versus 25 percent), and greater than many corporations with large profits, their interests are being treated merely as bargaining chips in the much bigger debate over tax reform.

That should offend every American's sense of fair play. But it doesn't, in part because most people think of taxpayers and poor people as distinctly different people. It's common to hear talk of poor people as "burdens on the taxpayer," yet over half of the nation's poor households were federal taxpayers in 1982, and many others had incomes from prior earnings that had been taxed — like Social Security and unemployment insurance. Two-thirds of poor households have income from earnings, a little-known fact. So in 1981, when Congress failed to offset payroll taxes, or to raise the basic deductions and exemptions that determine where federal tax liability begins, people working at low-paying jobs found themselves taxed on incomes below the poverty line. That had not always been true.

Until the 1970s, below-poverty incomes were exempt from all but Social Security payroll taxes, which were still low. In 1975, after payroll taxes had been raised to pay for annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) in Social Security benefits, Congress created the EITC, or Earned Income Tax Credit, to reimburse low-paid workers for their payroll tax deductions.

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Today, poor families pay high taxes because the tax provisions important to poor families were all frozen from 1979 to 1985, while the tax provisions important to all other groups were being made more generous. (Beginning in 1985, the standard deduction and personal exemption are indexed for inflation.) Rich people are affected by dozens of provisions in the tax code, but poor people are chiefly affected by three: the Zero Bracket Amount/standard deduction (for taxpayers who *don't* itemize, the ZBA/standard deduction largely determines where tax liability begins); the personal exemption (the amount by which taxpayers can reduce the income on which they pay taxes); and the EITC. While everybody else was getting bigger tax breaks, "working poor" families were getting bigger tax bills.

As a result, a family of four, with income at the poverty line, paid roughly $269 in federal and payroll taxes in 1978 but *$1076* in the same taxes in 1984, an increase of over 300 percent. Because the president and Congress neglected to adjust those tax provisions important to poor families, federal policy effectively pushed low-earning working people into after-tax poverty.

But those same provisions — the ZBA/standard deduction, the personal exemption, and the EITC (and to a lesser degree provisions like the child care credit) — could also be used to ease the plight of low-income families. That could happen with or without more comprehensive reforms, and would restore a measure of fairness to a tax system that has gotten badly out of balance.

The objective is simple: No one should be paying taxes on incomes below the poverty line. That is generally acknowledged — but not necessarily achieved — in each of the three major competing tax reform proposals before the Congress: Kemp-Kasten, Bradley-Gephardt, and the president's plan known as Treasury II. In relative terms, the administration's plan actually proves more helpful to most poor families than does the tax plan offered by Democrats Richard Gephardt (D.-Mo.) and Bill Bradley (D.-N.J.). But none of them would restore poor families to the tax situation they enjoyed in 1979, or to the tax situation they might have enjoyed if the tax provisions important to poor families had been reformed in the same way they were for other groups. Where poor people's interests are concerned, the tax reform proposals are a variant on the current raw deal: the numbers come out better than at present, but not so good as for poor people in the recent past.

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The steps needed to improve the system for poor people are not unknown or particularly complex. First, the ZBA/standard deduction has to be not only raised and indexed (all three of the leading tax reform measures would raise it to varying degrees and indexing starts in 1985), but adjusted as well so that single-parent households are no longer penalized (all but Bradley-Gephardt would do this). Since most poor families take the standard deduction and use the short form, just changing this provision will make a big difference to poor families.

The personal exemption — available to all taxpayers, no matter what their income — will be indexed for inflation as of 1985. That is one way to help, but not the most efficient way to help poor families. Less costly and more effective would be to convert the personal exemption to a tax credit — making it worth most to those with the lowest incomes, worth least to those with the highest incomes. (A tax credit is subtracted from the amount of taxes otherwise owed — the amount saved is the same regardless of one's tax bracket. Because the current exemption is a deduction from before-tax income, it is more valuable the higher one's tax bracket.) None of the rival proposals would make that change, but all of them would increase the personal exemption.

The combined effect of changes in the ZBA/standard deduction and the personal exemption are critical. Under current tax law, the standard deduction is $2,300 for a single person or single parent, and $3,400 for a married couple. The personal exemption is currently set at $1,000 per person. That means a mother with three children begins paying taxes when her income reaches $6,300 (four $1,000 exemptions, plus the $2,300 deduction for the household head), but a married couple with two children — same size family, different composition, begins paying taxes at $7,400 (four $1,000 exemptions plus a $3,400 deduction for a married couple). In 1979, when these levels were set, the poverty line for a family of four was $7,412, so there were virtually no taxes due; by 1984 the poverty line had risen to $10,613, but the deductions and exemptions had not; so families with poverty-level incomes had to pay taxes on roughly a third of income.

The three major tax reform plans before the Congress raise the standard deduction and personal exemption in ways similar enough that their effect on a four-person family with poverty-level income would be nearly the same, as the accompanying chart shows. But the three plans are not as similar in their impact on poor families with less than poverty-level incomes or different family size, nor would they have the same effect in future years. For example Bradley-Gephardt does not include an inflation factor for exemption or deduction, and fails to make adjustments that would help families with more than two children.

One thing more is needed to make the tax system fairer to low-earning households, and none of the three plans deals with it adequately: changes in the EITC. The EITC should not just be indexed to offset rising payroll taxes (only the president's plan does this); it should also apply to more income and be adjusted for family size so that larger families are not paying higher taxes than smaller families with the same income. None

TAXES APPLIED TO POVERTY-LEVEL EARNINGS, 1984
(For four-member and three-member families)

	Two Parents, Two Children ($10,613)	One Parent, Three Children ($10,613)	Two Parents, One Child ($8,277)	One Parent, Two Children ($8,277)
Actual 1984 Taxes	**$1,076** ($711 S.S.) ($365 IRS)	**$1,210** ($711 S.S.) ($499 IRS)	**$545** ($555 S.S.) (-$10 IRS)	**$675** ($555 S.S.) ($120 IRS)
1984 Taxes if 1979 Provisions Indexed:	**$192** ($651 S.S.) (-$459 IRS)*	**$413** ($651 S.S.) (-$238 IRS)*	**-$209** ($507 S.S.) (-$716 IRS)*	**-$113** ($507 S.S.) (-$620 IRS)*
Bradley-Gephardt:	**$711** ($711 S.S.) ($0 IRS)	**$1,105** ($711 S.S.) ($394 IRS)	**$339** ($555 S.S.) (-$216 IRS)	**$546** ($555 S.S.) (-$9 IRS)
Kemp-Kasten:	**$711** ($711 S.S.) ($0 IRS)	**$711** ($711 S.S.) ($0 IRS)	**$519** ($555 S.S.) ($36 IRS)	**$388** ($555 S.S.) (-$178 IRS)
Treasury II:	**$711** ($711 S.S.) ($0 IRS)	**$711** ($711 S.S.) ($0 IRS)	**$339** ($555 S.S.) (-$216 IRS)	**$339** ($555 S.S.) (-$216 IRS)

*Large minus figures reflect reimbursements for Social Security increases that would have resulted if EITC had been indexed.

Table adapted from a Children's Defense Fund paper.

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of the plans makes those changes. (The Children's Defense Fund has a proposal to add a "dependent allowance" to the EITC, costing an estimated $500 million.)

Because of the failure to make adequate adjustments in the EITC, as the chart reflects, families with poverty level incomes would still be subject to payroll taxes. Of the three plans, the proposal by Republicans Jack Kemp (R.-N.Y.) and Robert Kasten (R.-Wisc.) is the most troublesome in this respect. By lowering the value of the EITC, Kemp-Kasten would result in a net tax increase for many working poor families.

These three elements are not the whole story for poor families. How mortgages and fringe benefits are treated, whether the dependent care credit is adjusted, and what happens to state and local taxes affect poor taxpayers as much or more than middle-class and wealthy taxpayers. And poor people are directly affected by broader tax policy issues — like the president's myopic unwillingness to use tax reform to increase tax revenues and reduce the federal deficit, or to acknowledge that his "reform" is not an across-the-board tax cut. But such matters *are* inextricably related to overall tax reform; making the system fairer for poor families need not be.

The danger in the present tax debate is not that the interests of poor families cannot be figured out or that the necessary improvements are unknown. Rather, it is that poor families' interests are as low on the list now as they were in 1981. The PACs now holding expensive fund-raisers for members of the congressional tax-writing committees don't have the tax treatment of minimum-wage workers on their agendas; the high-priced lobbyists aren't pressing for fast action on behalf of poor families; and the women who clean other women's houses aren't known to make political contributions. That doesn't mean poor people are entirely without advocates; but the numbers and power of these advocates are small, and the sense of urgency that should be felt by the Congress on their behalf isn't there.

The House of Representatives, most observers agree, will have a chance to vote on a tax reform bill this year. The Senate, most think, will not, pushing action on tax reform into 1986 — an election year. That does not bode well for the interests of poor taxpayers. But the unfairness in the present system is so clear Congress should move to correct at least this one piece of bad tax policy whether there is "comprehensive" tax reform passed or not. Six years of a raw deal should be enough.

THE CHURCH IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Official harassment, growing solidarity

JANE LEFTWICH

DESPITE THE Czechoslovak government's refusal to make any mention of the event in the state-controlled media, more than 100,000 people flooded the tiny village of Velehrad, Slovakia, last July to take part in the 1,100 anniversary celebration of the death of St. Methodius, recognized with his brother St. Cyril as Christianizers of the Slavs. The news blackout and the massive attendance together reflected two aspects of the church's situation in today's Czechoslovakia. First, whether above-ground or underground, the church is alive and growing. Second, it confronts an official, systematic, and often vitriolic campaign of anti-religious repression, one that has intensified as a result of the election of a Polish pope and the crisis of Polish society.

Although Cardinal Casaroli, the Vatican representative, was invited to attend the celebration and met with Communist party and state officials, Czechoslovak leaders made no further concessions. Cardinals Basil Hume of London, Jean-Marie Lustiger of Paris, and Franz Koenig of Vienna were all denied visas when they applied to come to the ceremony. Poland's Cardinal Jozef Glemp was in Yugoslavia when his application for a visa to Czechoslovakia was refused. Ultimately, he was given a transit visa days after the celebration that allowed him to spend twenty-four hours in Czechoslovakia meeting with church officials. To further minimize the event, Western broadcasters, like BBC, were also barred.

Although 17,000 Czechoslovaks signed a petition requesting that Pope John Paul II be invited to attend, Czech authorities ignored the fact that Prague's Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek had invited the pope. The pope received no government invitation. Even the pope's letter to his "Slavic Brothers" on the occasion was consigned to the underground press.

Yet in spite of the limits and obstacles erected by the Czech regime, the July celebration, the largest popular demonstration in Czechoslovakia in years, was a moment of relative ease for both Protestant and Catholic churches. Churches in heavily Catholic Slovakia and the less traditionally religious and more

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Protestant Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia have been systematically threatened with emasculation since the Communist takeover in 1948. With the defeat of the Prague Spring reforms in 1968, bureaucratic restrictions and harassment of religion became increasingly severe. In spite of this harassment, some 60 percent of the population is estimated to be Roman Catholic and 15 percent Protestant. More and more of these believers have had to resort to quasi-legal or illegal religious activities just to keep up a more than nominal teaching and ministering of their faiths. Religion survives, but only under the constant threat that members and clergy will be prosecuted for some small deed — praying together, talking about religion in their homes, sharing religious books and magazines, teaching religion to children — based on Act 178 of the Penal Code which prohibits anyone from "obstructing the state's right to supervise religious activity."

The options for the official church are limited and its present and future prospects are bleak. Over the years, some priests elected to join Pacem in Terris, a Catholic organization organized by and loyal to the government. For most, though, the fact that the pope and their cardinal have condemned the organization makes it a less than proud affiliation. If they belong, it is only to give themselves some peace and security. Pacem in Terris is only one part of the government's effort to insure docility to the regime. Admission to the two state-sanctioned theological schools is controlled by the government. Those few admitted — far fewer than the number of priests and ministers needed — "have to be loyal to the state and they must have other qualifications necessary for admission to state service. . . ." A government license is required to work in a church, even as an ordained minister or priest, and the license is hard to get and even easier to lose. To be too outspoken and too popular — especially with young people — is to risk losing one's license to preach, to have a driver's license revoked, or to be summarily given early retirement. Local parishes disappear rapidly in the govenment's legal shuffle — any post not filled in three months is dropped and government approval for appointments is virtually never given in time. The result is a clergy (most of whom have to serve three or more congregations at the same time) who know that visible commitment and vigorous leadership are often rewarded with the loss of a license. For those who get and keep licenses, demoralization and accommodation are temptations difficult to resist. As Czechoslovakia's primate reported in his letter on the "priestly mission," the obituary for one priest holds true for many of his now elderly fellow clergy: "I preached the cross; I bore the cross; and I fell from prostration under the cross."

At eighty-five Cardinal Tomasek himself is an unbending and outspoken critic of official policy toward religion and the churches, and a defender of religious freedom and the rights of believers. His public walk from the Prague cathedral to his residence after Sunday Mass, during which untold numbers of people gather around him in Prague's main square, is a weekly demonstration of the church's power. He must work, however, without a staff since the government will not approve anyone to help him. The Catholic paper that he should, by rights, control is edited by activists in the Pacem in Terris group so it serves the government and often blocks the cardinal's own messages. Even his hierarchy is troubled; because the government has refused to sanction Vatican candidates and the Vatican has refused to accept the government's men, ten of Czechoslovakia's thirteen dioceses have no bishop to head them.

For the five hundred priests and Protestant ministers who are without licenses to work, the options are tough: some choose to work as manual laborers or survive at some "above-ground" job while working in the underground church. For believers who are not ordained, the risks of involvement, as opposed to merely occasional church attendance, are also great. In June and July of this year alone:

- seven Catholic activists had their offices searched and were arrested in Prague, Olomouc, and other Czech towns;
- Jan Carnogursky, a lawyer and his seventy-seven-year-old historian father had their house in Bratislava searched and all their Czechoslovak and foreign religious books and articles confiscated. The secret police colonel who conducted the search and interrogation informed the father that, "It would have been better if the Germans had killed you for helping Jews in the war.";
- house searches were done of those involved with the Franciscan order (banned along with all religious orders in the fifties) in several towns. Religious books, friars' habits, and hosts were confiscated, and one member of the order was jailed for illegal practice of religion;
- two young men were sentenced to prison terms for bringing ("smuggling") religious literature into Czechoslovakia.
- two young men were sentenced to prison terms for bringing ("smuggling") religious literature into Czechoslovakia.

One can tick off dozens of similar cases in recent years: Three young people jailed for spreading religious materials. Ten young Catholics convicted of "performing a play without official authorization." An evangelical minister arrested for leading a group of young people in prayers, Bible readings, and hymns. A parish priest detained and stripped of his license for showing religious slides to children on the church premises. A church organist arrested for "holding religious services in his home and discussing religious subjects." A lay minister jailed for two years for his work with deprived and abandoned children, mostly Gypsies. Franciscans, arrested and imprisoned, and hundreds of those they served subject to house searches and interrogations.

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These are but a small and inadequate example of the pressures and sanctions used against those involved with religion in Czechoslovakia. In a report on "the state and religion" done in 1984 by VONS (Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted) on repression of Catholics since 1979, sixty other specific cases were listed as well as a number of cases of harassment of underground religious orders and harassment of those believers who form significant groups among the signatories of Charter 77.

What is it that causes this reaction by the political authorities to organized religion?

- There is a growing interest in spite of the postwar repression and the atmosphere of demoralization since the Prague Spring. One estimate is that 60 percent of all practicing Catholics are under thirty-five, and another that in Catholic Slovakia, 70 percent of children are baptized.
- The authorities fear the influence of John Paul II, who even as a cardinal from Poland could draw huge crowds when he visited Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovak authorities also fear any contagion from Poland's Solidarity and its ideas, many of which have religious overtones.
- Cardinal Tomasek and others have exhibited an increasing unwillingness to let religion die or be subjugated to the authorities' whims. With the pope's 1982 condemnation of state-controlled church groups, nearly half of the Catholic priests have left the quisling Pacem in Terris organization which takes a pro-regime line and dominates most state-run Catholic publications. In the face of the state's various repressive devices, even these above-ground priests (many of whom were ordained secretly in the Stalinist period) have turned increasingly to the underground church for life and sustenance.
- A church underground flourishes, complete with services, religion classes, and religious discussions held in private homes, often by ordained but unlicensed clergy. An expanding series of underground religious publications includes books ranging from a children's story of Jesus to volumes on Buddhism.
- Many practicing Catholics and Protestants have important roles in the growing unofficial movements opposing the stationing of Soviet nuclear weapons in Czechoslovakia and supporting nuclear disarmament. These movements bring religiously motivated Czechs into close contact with similar activists in Eastern Europe and the West.
- People still cherish the dreams and proposals of 1968 which called for church life independent of state control and freedom of belief as a basic freedom, and an ecumenical movement drawing together once divided groups of Protestants and Catholics.

And what do they want, these Protestants and Catholics fighting for the right to be religious? Nothing as "radical" as they sought in 1968 or as they see fellow Christians enjoying in the West. But as one dissident told a Western journalist, "We only want what they have in East Germany, Hungary, and Poland."

Screen

AGNES OF GOD

RUMORS OF REVELATIONS

AGNES OF GOD is the fall's first Serious Film. It will no doubt be praised, if only for being a welcome relief from the summer's glut of teenpix. It is literate and adult. The Broadway success has been adapted by playwright John Pielmeier and the screenplay is directed by Norman Jewison, an Oscar winner for *In the Heat of the Night* and almost a repeater for last year's *A Soldier's Story*. In *Agnes* Jewison tackles a faintly similar story: the investigation of alleged infanticide by a disturbed young nun moments after she gives birth to her baby. Jewison has enlisted big names for the key roles: Meg Tilly (of *The Big Chill*) as the mad — or is it mystic? — title character; Anne Bancroft as the mother superior who tries to shield the young nun during the investigation; and, marking a return to the screen after four years of aerobic exercises, Jane Fonda as a court-appointed psychiatrist who attempts to find out what motivated Agnes, who got her pregnant, and — as the plot thickens — who else may have killed the baby.

So far, one thinks, all well and good; but *Agnes* is still holy hooey. The film's problems are many, both aesthetic and intellectual. To take the former first, *Agnes* is an unsuccessful adaptation, though not for obvious reasons. Fonda has remarked, with a degree of amazement, that some of the film's scenes are single-shot dialogues of ten or twelve minutes, a form "almost unheard of in movies nowadays." Such emphasis on the spoken word indicates the film's theatrical roots, its concern with character and psychology. But with this particular subject, something else was needed besides literate fidelity. Screen can be a potent source of magic, or a convincing medium for the sensational. But with a realistic director using a contemporary setting, film is less hospitable to sensation and hysteria. On stage, great performers can win for wild melodrama a willing suspension of disbelief (or of disapproval) by the sheer force of turbulent verbal energy. Screen neutralizes the spoken word; it's harder to be swept away when the visuals keep on reinforcing the solidity of the here and now.

On the bare Broadway stage, the role of Agnes was tailor-made for flamboyant theatrics. Amanda Plummer made the most of it, with her bizarre descriptions of angels, or a mysterious "Sister Maria," or St. Michael the Archangel, hovering in the air outside her convent window. On screen, Meg Tilly also achieves an incandescent intensity with such material in several selected moments. But Jewison has no way to film her mind and give his Agnes the same power as Agnes on stage. In *A Soldier's Story*, his cool, realistic directorial style perfectly matched the plot of the play he was adapting, the slow discovery of the truth about the sergeant's murder by a

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cool, realistic army captain doing the prosecuting. But in *Agnes*, the objective investigator is only one of three major characters — Fonda. Jewison's style matches hers, but the substance of the rest remains strange, never fully assimilated.

Ironically, Jewison did not help himself in this regard when he hired Sven Nykvist, Ingmar Bergman's cinematographer. Perhaps he should have hired Bergman himself for his gift of familiarizing the strange. Nykvist's work is exquisite, especially when matched with the choice of a secluded boys' school in Canada as the convent where the murder and investigation take place. Jewison wanted to create "a complete world of its own," and Nykvist wanted to photograph it in crisp, northern light. Their vision of Agnes, particularly as she sits next to her window, was borrowed from Vermeer and his frequent depictions of clear shafts of light falling on women by windows. But those were women of the world — with jugs, guitars, or letters in hand. What *Agnes* needs is a visual style that is, in moments at least, less lucid, or less rational — something Italian and medieval, not Dutch.

Agnes's plot is also annoying, on several grounds. Pielmeier and Jewison exploit all the ingredients of the who-dun-it, but then provide, at the most, only half-answers. At one point Fonda is surreptitiously told by a crone-like nun to "search the basement files." When she does, she discovers that Anne Bancroft is really Agnes's aunt. But nothing of significance results from this — or from later revelations that Bancroft knew of Agnes's pregnancy all along and that a secret passageway may have been used by Agnes for a romantic (mystical?) assignation. These episodes tease us into thinking Fonda will break the case; they turn out to be leads that amount to very little. With such repetitive punch-pulling, *Agnes* isn't gothic but gimmick.

Agnes also plays fast and loose with the miraculous in an annoying manner. The mother superior initially gives the impression she believes the pregnancy may have been a miracle. Agnes herself, of course, talks of visits by "him," without clarifying whether this means God, St. Michael, or a human father. In the few scenes where Jewison tries to film her visionary experiences, however, this "him" acts more like a demon lover than anyone either sacred or profane. We never get to see "him" — a discordant element when Jewison presents us, otherwise, with an omniscient camera. At times, *Agnes* slides into a rip-off of Christian symbols for their shock value, more like *Rosemary's Baby* than a virgin birth.

Even the "normal" side of the story is a disappointment. Pielmeier's idea of contrasting faith and reason in the views of the mother superior and the psychiatrist is sound, but as actually treated here their conflict becomes forced and stereotypical. The "set-up" is evident from their first scene. They no sooner meet than they hoist their colors with several I-know-what-*you*-represent routines. Pace Fonda, this is not one of the scenes with ten to twelve minutes of dialogue; it's an abrupt rush to get at Significance, in which both she and Bancroft seem merely to be servicing the script.

When Bancroft does escape from caricature, she becomes a contradiction. At times we are told that the nuns in the convent practice very "ancient" rules, and that they do not represent contemporary Catholicism. Often, however, they are photographed at angles showing us crucifixes in the background — insistently reminding us of the convent as an expression of Christianity — or, even more pointedly, making sure we see pictures of John Paul II. The church hierarchy, naturally, is portrayed as only being interested in hushing up the case as quickly as possible. The only honest priest is a kindly codger who — just to show us he is on the side of the angels — offers the psychiatrist a drink and clearly enjoys his own. The mother superior is supposed to have been a woman of the world — we are told she was married and had children before entering the convent. But then, reverting to form, she glibly talks of miracles; she conceals most of the facts about Agnes from the psychiatrist; she is shocked but apparently does nothing when confronted with evidence that Agnes's state of mind may be rooted in peculiarly repellent experiences of child abuse; she exhibits an unusually casual attitude when Agnes suddenly receives the stigmata — something a superior would be bound to summon appropriate ecclesiastical agencies to investigate. Despite being given touches of sophistication, Bancroft has to play her role with a strange know-nothingism. Catholicism, the film implies, is really as creepy as we moderns always thought.

Fonda's character is more shadowy. There are slipshod, undeveloped references to her former Catholicism, a frustrating scene with her mother in a nursing home that explains

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nothing, and garbled allusions to a sister named Maria, which are supposed to establish a suggestive parallel with Agnes's visions. But none of this quite hangs together to explain her militant rationalism or her passion to find out the truth. Even her closing monologue conceding the possibility of miracles is too brief to provide her character depth.

By schema, Fonda and Bancroft are supposed to grow to like each other as the one probes, and the other protects, Agnes's fragile psyche. One scene, set in a gazebo inside the nunnery grounds, is supposed to climax this. A compulsive smoker, Fonda offers Bancroft a cigarette, despite convent rules, which Bancroft accepts with a touch of naughty pleasure. Their talk turns to saints and what they would be doing if they were alive now. But then their talk degenerates into what the saints would be smoking. Fonda and Bancroft break into a case of schoolgirl giggles; the laughter is supposed to represent the kind of bonhomie, signaling mutual respect, that strong rivals sometimes develop. But, like other elements in the film, I found the scene hard to fathom: Pielmeier wants a symbol of contemporary spirituality, a common point where mother superior and psychiatrist can meet, but then seizes on — smoking? We come close here to Merton's *Life and Holiness*, and its examination of sanctity in any setting. But what we get is a spiritually upscale commercial for Virginia Slims.

TOM O'BRIEN

Music

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

WILLIE NELSON'S SPREZZATURA

I AM AT the Kentucky State Fair, August 1985.

Willie Nelson is performing, and that alone is a kind of metaphor for his special stature and his special persona: even at this date, and even at this stage of his legend, he will still show up in a packed auditorium redolent of corn dogs and draft beer as readily as in a room smelling of expensive grass and Beefeater martinis. He can play Vegas as easily as Sinatra, but Louisville as well. (And when a need arises, he'll be on stage in Philly or Champaign.)

Waylon Jennings and Jessi Colter have performed man-and-womanfully in the first set. But it is Willie we came to see, and it is Willie who now, for an astonishingly long time, holds, prowls, and possesses the stage. "Whiskey River" — flat-out, full-tilt country blues — is his opener. It will also be, some two-and-a-half hours later, his sign-off number. But between those two versions of a basically simple tune will be encapsulated the kaleidoscope of American music which *is* Willie Nelson, from Cole Porter and Irving Berlin to anonymous spirituals to Woody Guthrie and Hank Williams and back again, all of it transformed and transfigured by a voice that may be one of the true marvels of twentieth-century song.

The audience loves him and he, at least in what Cardinal Newman would have called a notional sense, loves the audience right back. The feeling is a little like a Springsteen concert: you *know* there won't be any riots or bad craziness because you know that everybody here is here because they already cherish the performer. It is a very large, very public secret society. Total strangers smile and nod at one another as they sing along with Willie on "City of New Orleans" or "You Were Always on My Mind."

And then something magic happens: one of those things that makes working on stage better, richer, and more dangerous than any other kind of performance.

Willie has made the headband virtually a trademark. No, not a trademark, but a sacramental; Michael Jackson's single sequined glove, Prince's purple pants, even Waylon's wide-brim leather hat are all trademarks because they are all appurtenances with or without which the performance could still go on. But Willie Nelson wears a headband — or at least did originally — because his hair *is* long, because he *does* sweat when he performs, and because he does need to keep his hair out of his face. The headband is both functional and symbolic, in other words. And we, his fans, know it. That is why, at his concerts, fans make a habit of throwing supplementary headbands, knotted handkerchiefs, onto the stage.

Comes the magic moment.

Louisville, August 1985; Willie on stage playing and singing; the audience throwing headbands onto the stage, and, in the middle of a solo, Willie stretches out his right arm and perfectly — *perfectly* — catches the thrown circle of cloth on his wrist and continues with his guitar playing while the crowd, of course, goes mad.

It was, to be sure, an absurd accident: Nelson might as well have missed the thrown headband and looked clumsy as to have caught it and looked for the moment godly. But to miss the beauty of absurd accidents in life is to experience the beginning of despair. *Sprezzatura* is what the Italians of the Renaissance called it: a kind of gracefulness, a kind of assurance that makes even fouling-up look like not-fouling-up. The reason I am sharing this relatively trivial instant with you is that it is not, after all, trivial, but is in fact an image of the special genius of Willie Nelson.

Remember the concept of *sprezzatura*: making everything look easy. Willie makes everything look — or sound — easy. Easy as in casual; easy as in effortless; easy as in demanding an expenditure of nervous energy that would leave most of us gasping for breath or gagging for a B2 shot.

I am not writing this to celebrate the genius of Willie Nelson (of course I really am, but the conventions of journalism say that I'm not supposed to): I am writing this, outside of parentheses, to observe the fact that Willie Nelson is *not* a country-western singer, and perhaps not even a "singer" in the conventional sense at all. He, God help him, seems to have turned himself into a living repository of the tradition of American popular song. There is *nothing*, apparently, that he won't do, from "My Mother's Eyes" to Duke Ellington's "Don't Get Around Much Anymore."

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And everything he does, he reinterprets. I said "God help him" once, and now I say it again, even more seriously. God help him, he is both an artist and a critic of his own art: in some ectoplasmic bar at the end of the universe, Willie and James Joyce will have a lot to talk about.

Think about — *listen* to — his version of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," maybe one of the four or five songs that every American knows, note for note. "Somewhere over the rainbow/Bluebirds fly," say Harold Arlen's lyrics in an imperishable expression of longing. Sam Goldwyn wanted to cut the song from *The Wizard of Oz*, Judy Garland inserted it irrevocably into the American consciousness, and now Willie has canonized what Judy sanctified.

The choice of words, maybe, bothers you? Well, as we used to say at Yale, tough. "Canonized" and "sanctified" belong as surely to the tradition of American song as they do to any other tradition of storytelling and mythmaking, just because *all* storytelling and mythmaking are, unless you want a serious quarrel, manifestations of the presence of the Lord.

Back to Willie Nelson and "Over the Rainbow." It is a song of hope and of infinite expectation; but Willie deliberately flats the note on "birds" — as in "bluebirds fly" — injecting or infecting the song with the melancholy that is such an inevitable part of its own optimism. This is not the, after all, rather boring Barbra Streisand exploring the simple ironies of "Happy Days Are Here Again"; it is not even the rather wonderful Bette Midler turning all of American song into the stuff of a standup comedy routine. Nor is it Linda Rondstat or Toni Tennille, good as they are, but rather a *reclamation* and rediscovery of songs we thought we had already heard too often. Like Billie Holiday — the one singer to whom he can be seriously compared — Willie brings pristine intelligence to the cliché-ridden lyrics among which we live our lives. And is this not the central act of intelligence altogether?

The comparison to Billie Holiday, by the way, is carefully considered. She was probably — *is* probably — the most moving jazz singer America will produce: not even Diana Ross, impersonating her in *Lady Sings the Blues*, could tarnish the beauty of her recorded legacy. And like Willie, she is more an interpreter of other people's songs than a composer of strong lyrics herself. The sad sweetness of her voice — even if one did not know the terrible details of her life — transforms even the tawdriest of sentimental songs into the hopeful melancholy of which, after all, American popular music is made.

Willie, too. Listen to him (on the *Over the Rainbow* album) perform that corniest of songs, "My Mother's Eyes": even the title is skin-crawlingly embarrassing. But, by accepting the sentimentality of the music and lyrics, by making them a part of himself, Willie — not redeems — but rediscovers the song for himself and for us; reminding us, in the process, that anyone who thinks that "sentimental" means "stupid" hasn't understood Shakespeare.

Like Billie Holiday and also like Thelonious Monk, Willie

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frequently lags a half-beat or so behind the conventional rhythm of the songs he performs, creating effectively his own time, a reflective, meditative time in which we, as is he, are compelled to re-examine, actually *listen* to, even the most shopworn of harmonies. To hear him do "Stardust" is like the shock of actually *seeing* the features on that most common and most commonly ignored of American icons, the dollar bill: you are delighted to find out that, behind the banality of repetition, something was actually *there* all along. Holiday and Monk are gone now. But, if they ever elect me God for a day, I would bring them both back to record, with Willie, *Porgy and Bess*. It could have been the apotheosis, the *Magic Flute,* of American song.

Add to all this one more quality, or maybe just an extension of what I have been discussing: charity. "Willie Nelson and Family" is the conventional billing for his tours, and his anthem, "On the Road Again," contains the very serious line, "The life I love is making music with my friends." His prodigious output — sometimes four albums a year — includes an amazing number of collaborations with other singers, famous and unknown. And this is not accidental. One assumes that the private man is prey to the same sillinesses and lapses of grace to which we are all, children of Adam, heir. But the public self, the invented self, is an image of generosity and enthusiastic support for "making music with my friends." American popular music for Willie, in other words, is a glorious pretext for a community sing. And to say that is to say that whether he is doing "Whiskey River" or "Amazing Grace" his art is an art of reaffirmation in the most serious theological sense.

"American popular music" — it is a curious phrase to use, since it implies such a rich and varied tradition, a tradition whose complexity and beauty academic musicologists are only just beginning to recognize. But, until the academics catch up to the intelligence of the performers — on auditorium stages, in cocktail lounges, and even at state fairs — it is comforting to know that, with Willie, the heritage, the legacy, and the spirit are in safe keeping.

FRANK McCONNELL

Books: CAN MORALITY BE REASONED?

ETHICS AND THE LIMITS OF PHILOSOPHY

Bernard Williams

Harvard, $17.50, 230 pp.

Daniel Callahan

CONTEMPORARY Anglo-American analytical philosophy has been on a rationalistic binge for at least three decades. Once it threw out emotivism — the view that ethical statements are nothing but expressions of feeling and taste — the ethics branch of that establishment turned its attention to normative theory. Would it be possible to discover a solidly rational foundation for ethics, preferably in the form of a few utterly secure propositions that would allow the generation of compelling moral rules? Can a rational procedure for resolving moral conflicts be developed? Might a structure of moral propositions be devised that would commend general assent? The absence of a significant role for feeling and emotion, on the one hand, and for historical and social knowledge, on the other, is striking. This is meant to be no-nonsense, unblinking rationalism, clean as a whistle.

The British philosopher Bernard Williams has achieved some prominence in recent years not so much for presenting any striking moral perspective of his own, but for steadily chipping away at that rationalistic ambition. Along with Alasdair MacIntyre and a few others, he has tried to present some alternative routes to moral knowledge while remaining firmly within the mainstream academic boundaries. His general contention is that "the demands of the modern world on ethical thought are unprecedented, and the ideas of rationality embodied in most contemporary moral philosophy cannot meet them; but some extension of ancient thought, greatly modified, might be able to do so." Except for a few hints here and there, he actually says little about the way in which "ancient thought" might be profitably modified; the book is mainly an extended critique of rationalism.

The way he poses the general issue is to ask whether philosophy can answer the fundamental question of Socrates: how should one live? Of course an answer to that question depends upon what is meant by "philosophy." For Plato it meant an abstract, general, rationally reflective mode of inquiry; arguments must be rationally persuasive. To Plato's belief that questions about how one ought to live could be answered by that mode of inquiry, Williams counterpoises a more skeptical account of philosophy's capacity, but not one that would be any means jettison it altogether. It is a sufficient contribution of philosophy if it can succeed in dethroning that long-standing form of reductionism that seeks some final, irreducible pattern for moral reasoning, one on which a much larger edifice to handle our everyday lives can be constructed. Williams puts the issue this way: "If there is such a thing as the truth about the subject matter of ethics . . . why is there any expectation that it should be simple? In particular, why should it be conceptually simple . . .?"

In thinking about Williams's questions, I began wondering to what extent ordinary people, and not only rationalistic moral philosophers, think that ethics does, or should, reduce to some simple, clear principles. I suspect they do, if my own experience is any guide. If ethics cannot provide answers reducible to such principles, then it is assumed that all is chaos, mere taste, power, or private inclination. The emotivist assault on ethics of the 1930s through the 1950s (abetted by a popular anthropological relativism) has well saturated the culture, its power lingering on beyond its relatively short

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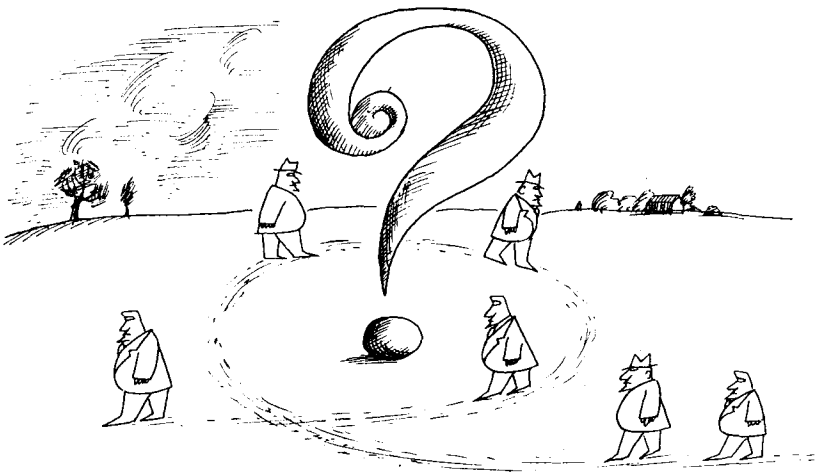
life within academic philosophy. The philosopher's demand for a foundation secure against such assaults is matched by a widespread lay belief in the same need.

Philosophers like Bernard Williams may take a more moderate, and ultimately more reasonable, tack in seeking to disgorge the lump of pure reason in philosophy's throat; but they are nonetheless left with a sharp dilemma on their hands. If one strays too far from rationally persuasive foundations for morality, one runs the risk of losing philosophical credibility altogether; for morality ought to commend itself to reason in some sense. Even David Hume, with his famous claim that "reason is the slave of the passions," believed that reason can and does tutor those passions. Yet to play too heavily to the demand for rational justification is to remain infected by the very disease that needs to be cured.

In keeping with his complex vision, Williams presents no single, well-developed thesis. This is a discursive, at times wandering, book, as elegant in its individual paragraphs, aphorisms, and arguments, as it is loose and open-ended in its structure. There is nothing like a book of this kind to make one long for an



old-fashioned architectonic, rationalistic argument, one that has a clear beginning and end. But the very message of this book is the foolhardiness of that quest, and it is a case persuasively, if sometimes disjointedly, made. I think that message is quite right, but it leaves one with none of the satisfaction and sense of lovely (however false or irrelevant) coherence of single-premise moralities. Yet it may produce a deeper satisfaction in the long run: that morality is being grappled with in a way much closer to our lives and experiences. Of course they are frequently a mess, but not without possibilities for some rational, though not rationalistic, order.

Told in idioms black & wise

MOSES
MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN
Zora Neale Hurston
University of Illinois, $6.95 paper, 351 pp.

DUST TRACKS ON A ROAD
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Zora Neale Hurston
University of Illinois, $22.95, $8.95 paper, 348 pp.

Bette S. Weidman

IN a recent lecture at the New York Public Library, Paule Marshall paid tribute to the "Mother Poets," black women of her mother's generation whose storytelling was the best she ever heard: "They took the King's English and made it into an instrument that expressed them. It was for them an art form." Like Marshall's own mother, Zora Neale Hurston was a special talker, a "mouth king." She is also the writer, above all others, who transferred the language of the "Mother poets" to the printed page. It is no wonder that her reputation has been reborn, in part through the efforts of today's black women writers, her literary daughters.

In Hurston's newly reprinted novel, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, and in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, contemporary readers are treated to the bold and vigorous English of a woman who learned to speak in the black town of Eatonville, Florida, in the 1890s. With "the map of Dixie on [her] tongue," she struggled for her education at Morgan and Howard University, then traveled north to New York, where Franz Boas trained her as an anthropologist. Returning to Florida, to the Bahamas and Haiti, Hurston collected black folklore and music and wrote a handful of books that make a permanent contribution to American literature: the novels, *Their Eyes Were Watching God, Jonah's Gourd Vine*, and *Moses, Man of the Mountain*; the folklore collections, *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*. We cannot do without their verbal richness, their portrayal of black life in the Southern small town and the backwoods lumber camp, their tributes to human generosity and the joy of love and their sharp criticism of greed and narrowness.

Hurston did not worry about plot; like Mark Twain, she knew the art of the story is in the telling. She takes the plot of *Moses* from the Old Testament, developing and changing as the novel form invites. She is not writing a modern-day *Exodus*, but rather putting her novelistic gifts to the service of the original biblical material. The scene is Egypt, Midian, and the wilderness before Sinai; the outlines of Moses' story are intact. The book's 340 pages are an imaginative investment in the characters of Moses and his contemporaries, developed through plentiful dialogue. There are no direct references to black Americans, but the whole book acknowledges the impact of the *Exodus* story on black culture in Africa and the Americas. The direct contribution of this culture is in its shaping of Hurston's experience of human character and idiom. Moses, Aaron, Pharoah, Miriam, Zipporah, Jethro, act and speak

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like the human beings Hurston spent her life observing.

Just as Exodus starts with the predicament of the midwives, so does Hurston. She follows the order of Moses' life as it unfolds through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, but makes some fascinating contributions that seem more like intuition than invention. The queenly personality of Zipporah, the twisted energies of Miriam, the confused ambition of Aaron, all contribute sense to the scant biblical offering. Miriam's decision to die and her overpowering sense of psychological oppression are rendered realistically in Hurston, while the Book of Numbers simply describes Miriam's punishment and death briefly. Moses' initial flight from Egypt after killing the overseer is rendered in one line in Exodus; Hurston gives special importance to this first escape from Egypt by drawing on the rhetorical skills she absorbed from the black sermon tradition.

Realism has a special place in this novel; it is invoked for character analysis, but not for the story's donnée — the presence of God. In Hurston's novel, the pillar of fire that leads the Israelites is the biblical pillar; God's presence is unquestioned. She succeeds in making her Moses both believable and remote, a Connecticut Yankee with horse sense and humor, faced with a heroic task. Her book satirizes misused power and shows the grit and sacrifice required for political leadership; while it dramatizes the backsliding and conflicting ambitions among people, it also illumines Moses' memorable supporters: his first teacher, the non-biblical old stableman, Mentu; his gently prodding father-in-law, Jethro; his devoted young son-soldier, Joshua; and, of course, the unremitting Voice.

Dust Tracks on a Road is further evidence of Hurston's ability to reveal character and scene in language that has, in her words, "plenty of seasoning." She begins this partial autobiography with a description of the politics of black and white Florida at the turn of the century, backed by a sharp account of the dispersal of the Florida Indians. Her father, John Hurston, from "over the creek" in

(Continued on page 538)

Religious booknotes

Of Judaism, Jesus, money, & metaphor

David Toolan

YOU read some books, like Franz Mussner's *Tractate on the Jews* because they are monuments of quiet erudition and bold thinking in the sensitive area of Jewish-Christian relations. This

Tractate on the Jews: The Significance of Judaism for Christian Faith, by Franz Mussner. Translated by Leonard Swidler. Fortress, $29.95, 339 pp.

work, a major reconstructive step forward from the Christian side, deserves a second mention in these pages — for all those who see that the recovery of Christianity's Jewish roots is one of the most important developments of the time. But then, in this quarter, from the Jewish side, some books are simply dynamite. Olivier Revault D'Allonnes reminds you that before the Bible was written,

Musical Variations on Jewish Thought, by Olivier Revault D'Allonnes. Translated by Judith L. Greenberg. George Braziller, $10.95, 113 pp.

it was first the creation of an oral culture, a message of the distinctive Israelite Muse. In this intense "musical reverie" he captures the nomadic, restless heart of Judaism, its power of negation, its unstoppable imaginative passion rooted in the vertical dimension of God's unconditional will and promise of a just world. Harold Bloom's introduction corrects D'Allonnes's score on several points; nonetheless, his variations on a theme will resound in your inner ear.

But it's not just a matter of unearthing roots. Judaism, as the post-

The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism, by Abraham J. Heschel. Edited by Samuel H. Dresner. Chicago, $24.95, 213 pp.

humous publication of Abraham Heschel's *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov* reminds you, is a living tradition

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— and when the word of God was being fossilized in eighteenth-century Protestant and Catholic Scholasti-

The Potent Self: A Guide to Spontaneity, by Moshe Feldenkrais. Harper & Row, $15.95, 240 pp.

cism, it was alive and thriving in the Jewish folk underground. At the time, Hasidic teaching stories may have been the closest thing around to the parables of Jesus — and Heschel's special feeling for this material brings them to life. This same earthy spirituality filled the work of the late Moshe Feldenkrais, an Israeli and one of the great physical therapists of our time. Though his last book (he died in 1984), *The Potent Self*, never once mentions God, it deserves to be on the reading list of anyone interested in a holistic approach to spirituality. Feldenkrais's "functional integration"

Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality, by Kenneth Leech. Harper & Row, $20.95, 500 pp.

demonstrated a way to spit and spirit through the body — or a way to give spirit body.

From this Jewish base, I turn to two wonderfully accessible books on Christian themes whose form represents something of an innovation in usual theological genres (I told you, they are *accessible*!). The first is Kenneth Leech's ribsticking *Ex-*

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periencing God, which reflects on the "transforming knowledge of God" from Sinai to Desert Fathers to Julian of Norwich and Dorothy Day. It is at once a history of the many-limbed Western spiritual quest and theological reflection of the highest quality — superb, I would think, for college classroom, catechesis, and the pleasure of learning how rich is the tradition, how polynomial is God. Not the least of this book's merits is that it recaptures the Jewish balancing act D'Allonnes speaks of; it puts faith and inwardness together with the outward-bound quest for social justice.

Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture, by Jaroslav Pelikan. Yale, $22.50, 270 pp.

In a similar historical vein but with its own twist is Jaroslav Pelikan's brand new *Jesus through the Centuries*. Pelikan takes us on another journey into time, here using transformations in the image of Jesus as a key to the "genius of an age," its often unspoken cultural heartland. What does it tell us about an epoch when Jesus is imagined as rabbi, turning point of history, king of kings, Christ crucified, monk, bridegroom of soul, universal man, common-sense teacher, liberator? The specific image unlocks the dynamic of the time. The publisher might have been more generous with the illustrations, which in this kind of book are more

Toward a Christian Economic Ethic: Stewardship & Social Power, by Prentiss L. Pemberton and Daniel Rush Finn. Winston Seabury, $11.95, 256 pp.

than usually crucial. But again, we have here, besides feast for any reader, believer or not, a splendid educational tool, a welcome epilogue to H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* on a broader canvas.

The topic of religion and culture naturally raises practical questions for the here-and-now. *Toward a Christian Economic Ethic* provides a helpful introduction to the dismal science of economics from the perspective of Christian social ethics. Sociologist of religion Prentiss L. Pemberton and economist Daniel Rush Finn set the problem in terms of a common sense of powerlessness to do much about the persistence of massive poverty that condemns some forty-six million Americans (as of 1982) to a "dead end." The authors go on to give a history of the breakdown of the Christian economic ethic before Lockean liberalism and various forms of state and corporate capitalism, which is then followed by a critical exposition of current economic theory (in terms that, gratefully, even I can comprehend). Finally, we are offered a blueprint for small, disciplined communities of faith which, starting locally, can make a difference. (We're told, aren't we, that there were only "the twelve" to start with; well, if just ten produce *Commonweal*, anything is possible!)

Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding, by Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell. Texas Christian University Press, $16.95, $10.95 paper, 217 pp.

Shift gears a bit. The following book, not a light read, is for those with an interest in science and religion. *Metaphoric Process*, by *Commonweal* columnist Mary Gerhart and physicist Allan Melvin Russell, breaks new ground in the old querulous division between the "two cultures." The link is provided by a fresh apprehension of the function of metaphor, not as decoration or analogy, but as the vehicle of knowing-in-process at the moment that new insight or understanding breaks in. At their "nascent" moment, argue the

The Re-Creation of Eve, by Rosemary Haughton. Templegate, $8.95, 147 pp.

authors, the method in both the exact sciences and the humanities is the same. Einstein imagined what it might be like to ride around on a photon at the speed of light — and had an "ontological flash" analogous to what happens in religious awakenings. Suddenly Newton's rigid bodies turned plastic, space warped, time dilated or contracted, and very peculiar things happened to mass; it became convertible with energy. New metaphors opened up new meanings, new worlds. Similarly, to say what the object of religion is *like* (e.g., Jesus) stretches boundaries, opens up new possibilities of being in the world. In this sense, science and theology, at their *fons et origo*, refer, not to different worlds, but to the same world.

Heart of the World, by Hans Urs von Balthasar. Translated by Erasmo S. Leiva. Ignatius Press, $4.50, 219 pp.

More soul food: The subject has been covered by other writers but rarely so well. I recommend Rosemary Haughton's new book, *The Re-Creation of Eve* — a fine, unpolemical synthesis of the best current biblical scholarship on the significance and role of women in the New Testament, written in her succinct, graceful way (I just wish the print were larger, but the compensation is that the book is not long-winded).

The soul also requires beauty. I recommend the first English translation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Heart of the World*. It is a set of beautiful meditative reflections in which the borders between theology and

God's Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi, by Julien Green. Translated by Peter Heinegg. Harper & Row, $16.95, 273 pp.

prayer dissolve — a demonstration of the author's theological aesthetic in action. Finally, the soul needs good company. Then I must mention Julien Green's biography of St. Francis of Assisi. Can you stand another? Well yes, definitely one of this rare quality, combining as it does an elegant style, vivid portrait of the age, and Green's remarkable poetic ability to open Francis's whole world to you.

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(Continued from page 536)

Notasulga, Alabama, was trying to escape share-cropping poverty; her mother, Lucy Potts, was the "prettiest and smartest black girl in town," whose mother never forgave her for marrying "da yaller bastard." Zora was her mother's child: "Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to 'jump at de sun.' We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground." Unexpectedly, a third figure entered the story of Hurston's birth, a neighbor white man who heard her birth cries and assisted her mother in the absence of a midwife. "The man who grannied me" took a continued interest in Zora and his remembered importance is the first sign that this child would grow up taking her friends where she found them, regardless of race.

The ability to look beyond race, considered a blessing by Hurston, has often been regarded as a curse by black critics who see her as a reactionary. Reading *Dust Tracks* is a healthy corrective, as it offers the origins and the context for Hurston's view of whites. This new edition, particularly, with three chapters restored from the original manuscripts, makes Hurston's view of race clear. Today, in view of terrible destructiveness in the Middle East and Africa, her remarks seem appropriate and sane: "What the world is crying and dying for at this moment is less race consciousness. The human race would blot itself out entirely if it had any more. It is a deadly explosive on the tongues of men, I choose to forget it."

The most important chapters of *Dust Tracks* are those in which she describes the pioneer quality of Eatonville and its most interesting place, the front porch of the general store, and the later research she did in the Polk County, Florida lumber camps, in New Orleans HooDoo, and in the Bahamas. This part of the book resembles another classic of anthropology, Hortense Powdermaker's *Stranger and Friend*, in its unusual description of the process of fieldwork, including pitfalls and triumphs. We learn, too, of the work Hurston did to introduce black music to New York, spirituals, blues, and work songs as well as Bahamian song and dance. In other chapters, the book is much like Edith Wharton's *A Backward Glance*. The story of a life in progress, it pays tribute to the writer's friends and helpers, from Fannie Hurst to Ethel Waters, and succeeds in sharpening our sense of a rich and productive life.

Nature's place is in the . . . ?

THE TRAVAIL OF NATURE
THE AMBIGUOUS PROMISE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
H. Paul Santmire
Fortress, $16.95, 274 pp.

James McCue

IN 1967, Lynn White published a brief article in *Science*, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in which he argued that "orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature" played a major role in the genesis of the contemporary environmental crisis. Anthropocentrism, the banishing of deities from field and forest, the alleged human lordship over all other creatures, all played their role. White found in Francis of Assisi an exception and an alternative, but this did not exonerate mainstream Christianity. It was guilty, according to White, of creating an attitude toward nature which over the long haul has made it impossible for humankind to live in balance with nature.

Though many others discussed this issue it was really White who put it on the intellectual map; and it is White who provides the point of departure for Santmire's study. Santmire argues a somewhat different, but not totally contrary thesis: that the Christian theological tradition contains an ambiguous ecological promise; that there are parts of the tradition that provide the resources for a rich theology of nature that would lead in a direction quite different from the one identified by White, but that at the same time there are important elements in the tradition that lead just where White said. Santmire differs from White in arguing that St. Francis was not an isolated phenomenon within the Christian tradition, but part of a stream that runs back through, among others, Augustine, Irenaeus, and Paul. And though something of this tradition was picked up by the great Reformers, it has been sadly without advocates in more recent theology. Santmire then suggests ways in which this forgotten perspective might be reintegrated into contemporary theology.

Santmire works out his position with great care and in considerable detail. He is a careful reader of Irenaeus, Augustine, and many others, and he works with a sophisticated grasp of the issues in Pauline scholarship. Also, he clearly writes as someone to whom the Christian

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tradition is of great importance. There is an evident concern to get matters straight. His thesis is that there are present in early Christian writing three basic metaphors: the metaphors of ascent, of fecundity, and of migration to the promised land. The first of these leads almost almost inevitably to a nature-denying spirituality. The last leads almost inevitably to a Christian vision which incorporates nature as something of ultimate significance before God. The second can go either way, in conjunction with either of the others. And these emphases are to be found not only in post-New Testament Christian writing: they distinguish the fourth Gospel and Hebrews from Paul and Colossians and Ephesians. The tragedy is that we have gone too much the way of the fourth Gospel, too little the way of Paul and Irenaeus. And this nature-obliterating spirituality is partly responsible for the ecological crisis because it does not protect nature by investing it with a value and integrity of its own. Its only purpose is to serve human ends.

Santmire is generally convincing in his detailed readings of authors. One might wish to register a for-the-most-part agreement. The problems which I have with the book have to do with the larger issues which are presupposed but not adequately discussed. The most basic issue has to do with the very definition of the problem. What precisely were the attitudes which led to the present ecological crisis? Perhaps misled here by the previous discussion, Santmire proceeds as though this were altogether obvious. But is it?

It is possible to live with an anthropocentric (in the sense that humankind is the center of creation) theology, with the idea that humans are to subdue nature, with a spiritualizing theology that at least implicitly leaves nature out of its eschatology, without creating an environmental crisis, modern capitalism, or nuclear weapons. Christians did this for over a millennium, and at the end of that time were no nearer creating these things than they were at the beginning. Texts on subduing the earth were taken to imply nothing more than the already achieved agricultural revolution and the ability to sail the Mediterranean.

What led small groups of Western Europeans to evolve an approach to nature that gave us, in complex interrelationship, the capitalist world economy, the scientific and industrial revolutions, plus a set of religious and broadly cultural revolutions, and indeed the ecological crisis? It is just possible that Origenist theology was a key factor, but this is anything but obvious and cannot be merely asserted. Scholars from many historical subdisciplines have been considering these questions since at least the beginning of the century, and we are still far from consensus.

Unfortunately, because Santmire conceives of the problem primarily in terms of the conflict between world/nature denying and world/nature affirming versions of Christianity, he never actually looks closely at the times and the people in which this portentous *novum* was developing. Everything is reduced to an interplay among metaphors that were developed in classical form very early in Christian history. And it is assumed that it was the nature-denying tendency in Christianity that led to an unrestrained exploitation of nature. He seems to equate a tendency toward world denial with the spirit of modern industrial capitalism; whereas all they have in common is that neither involves a kind of nature mysticism.

Also, it is anything but clear that the problem is rooted in the view that *humankind* is the apex of creation. It would seem much more the case that we are threatened by a view of things that can not even take *humankind* seriously, a view that in principle is unable to take seriously the human community as a whole or in its future development. The claim, which runs through the entire

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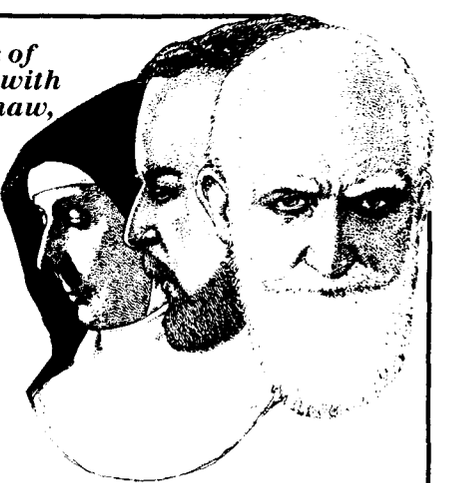
The Remarkable Friendships of Dame Laurentia McLachlan with Sydney Cockerell, Bernard Shaw, and Others

THE NUN THE INFIDEL AND THE SUPERMAN



D. FELICITAS CORRIGAN

Dame Laurentia McLachlan (1866-1953) spent seventy-two of her eighty-seven years at the Benedictine Abbey of Stanbrook in Worcester, England. She became Abbess in 1931. Although for the last sixty years of her life she never left the Abbey, the world came to her in admiration of her intellectual powers as musician, scholar, and administrator. Dame Laurentia's story is told by a present Stanbrook nun who knew her well–told, in the words of the *Times Literary Supplement*, "with a rare and refreshing innocence." Illus. $14.95

University of Chicago Press Chicago IL 60637

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book, that there can be no satisfactory anthropocentric ecological ethic is, it seems to me, pernicious despite its surface attractiveness. For there is simply no way, short of radical cultural lobotomy, that the human community can abandon its role of manipulator and exploiter of nature. The agricultural revolution took place ten thousand years ago, and with it went the possibility of living in passive harmony with nature. Indeed the whole notion of "harmony with nature" requires serious inspection. What would be meant by it? We cannot leave nature as God created it; we cannot even imagine what that would mean. I share Santmire's view that the ecological issue is one of the central issues of our time. But it seems to me that the problem is not that humans developed an extraordinary way of looking at things and have subsequently run amok. Rather, human beings have carried over attitudes that were "natural" in a time when human power over against the environment was altogether trivial to a time when our capacity to change that environment in irreversible and incalculable ways increases exponentially.

A further basic but undiscussed issue is whether changing religious ideas and sensibilities are a cause or effect of changing ways of treating nature. As recently as late in the nineteenth century, Norwegian immigrant farmers in northern Iowa sowed with their heads bared out of a sense of reverence for what they were doing. Their descendants, still largely pious Lutherans, no longer approach matters this way; and it seems highly doubtful that the change has come about because of changes in the theology taught in the seminaries serving this area. I think that most of us would agree that the changes are most plausibly explained by changes in the way in which sowing is done and the images and metaphors that are reinforced by this way of doing things.

So what we have here is a book that does well what it does, but which leaves the most basic questions still to be addressed. Santmire does a good job of tracing Christian ideas on the place of nature in the ultimate disposition of things. But this does not lead to a satisfactory answer to the question of the significance of Christian doctrine for the development of the peculiarly modern ecological problem. Because of the quality of what Santmire does do in this book, I hope that he will continue his work and address these more basic issues.

In Brief

EASY ESSAYS, *by Peter Maurin. Franciscan Herald Press, $6.95, 216 pp.*

This is the most recent edition of what might be called the "little green book" of the Catholic Worker movement. If books are to be judged by their fruits, *Easy Essays* must rank as a virtual seed catalog. Written by Peter Maurin in the decades of the Great Depression and the Second World War — Maurin died in 1949 — most of these deceptively "easy" essays (or outlines) originally appeared in *The Catholic Worker*. Maurin was Dorothy Day's mentor and collaborator in founding and directing the Catholic Worker paper and movement, one of American Catholicism's most creative, challenging, and enduring social contributions.

Maurin and Day were both a remarkable blend of the radical and the orthodox. As Maurin writes, "The life of a Christian must be a life of sacrifice." Maurin gave Day a sense of Christian history and tradition which launched and undergirded all the small, incremental contributions the Catholic Worker continues to make. Maurin's style was that of a repetitive street preacher, one graced at times with the poetic effect of a Charles Péguy. As Dorothy Day wrote, he believed in "driving home his point by constant repetition, like the dropping of water on the stones which were our hearts." While these essays are circumscribed by their time — note Maurin's essays on the racism and anti-Semitism of the Nazis — their application is as fresh as the morning paper.

Maurin faulted the church for not having exploded the powerful dynamite of its own social teaching. The bishops would do well to consult him today. "Modern society has made the bank account the standard of values," Maurin writes. His antidote: Christian personalism. "A personalist is a go-giver, not a go-getter," he comments, one who "has a social doctrine of the common good" and spreads it "through words and deeds," creating community. Such is Maurin's own enduring legacy.

This new edition of *Easy Essays* is enriched by twenty masterful woodcuts by Fritz Eichenberg, and an up-to-date foreword by Eileen Egan. P.J.

Commonweal welcomes letters on subjects treated in its pages. Letters of not more than 250 or 300 words naturally have a better chance of being published.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 514)

minister who can get too far ahead of his flock on any issue, doctrinal, ethical, or political, and still expect to hold on to his pulpit. Furthermore, the higher the denominational authority, the more unlikely it is that the average churchgoer will even know what it has said, much less be influenced by it, unless, for example, "the people in New York" have hit upon a particular sore spot such as providing church funds to allegedly Communist-influenced liberation groups. Here again there is an implicit ecumenical imperative: a free-wheeling and highly individualist Protestantism needs the anchorage of a more established structure, doctrine, and tradition, as much as Catholicism could profit by the type of lay leadership, congregational involvement, and open authority structures modeled by most Protestant churches. JOHN E. LAWYER, JR.

Rely on conviction

Great Neck, N.Y.

To the Editors: Peter Steinfels ["Appointment with Hitler," July 12] aptly calls pacifists to confront the most convincing argument against pacifism: What would have been the result if Hitler had not been opposed militarily, or would it not have been better to militarily squash him before he did so much harm?

Yes, pacifism leads to terrible suffer-

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ing of the innocent. So does war. A precise calculus of one versus the other is impossible. If the Germans (not Hitler — we seem to assume that Hitler singlehandedly did all the horrible acts he directed) did not complete the murder of all the Jews, was that benefit worth the cost of thirty million lives lost in the war? To even ask this sort of question is to realize how impossible it is to answer, because the sum of innocent suffering on both sides of the equation is not a number that can be derived with any accuracy; the definition of "innocent" becomes murky.

The "good German" says, "I was a concentration camp guard because the choice was the Russian front and almost certain death," or, "I fought because to refuse meant certain death."

Did we fight to preserve liberty? Our ally was the Soviet Union where for decades liberty had been extinguished. How innocent are we of the Holocaust if we made unconvincing and ineffective efforts to rescue the victims?

This sort of totting up of right and wrong and suffering, I am convinced, cannot answer the question of the validity of pacifism. If the ethical question is to be answered by attempting to decide whether peace or war leads to more justice and less suffering, no clear answer seems possible; most of the numbers would be based on speculation about what would have happened if something different had occurred.

Further, the terms of the question are fluid. Are we to limit it to the horrible deeds of the Germans in a particular period? What about the millions who were enslaved by the Soviets before World War II and after? What about the people in Asia who lost freedom and suffered terribly during the twentieth century? If it was right to stop the Germans from enslaving Europe, was it right to stand by as the Soviet government put millions of its citizens in Gulags? Is it ethical to restrict our responsibility to suffering that occurs when one nation invades another, and give the nation carte blanche for what it does to its own citizens?

Where do we put the suffering of innocents caused by misguided or malicious economic and social practices? Just one example: If we support the government of Guatemala economically and militarily, how responsible are we for the great suffering of its people?

Given this situation, I rely on the intuitive conviction — supported by what I consider the best witness of the religious geniuses of the past — that deliberately harming someone is wrong, unless it is transient, non-lethal harm for the sake of helping the person such as chemotherapy for cancer or physically subduing a mentally ill person about to harm himself or others. It may seem beneficial to me or my loved ones to kill someone else, but if I believe that the continuation of life is not the only or highest end, the conviction that I am in line with the ethic of love that is beyond numerical calculus, should be overriding.

It then boils down to one person's intuitive belief versus another's; not a situation conducive to any demonstrably superior answer; not an argument that can be answered decisively by a coercive, logical, and rational presentation. But, it is better to face squarely what requires faith, than to spuriously suppose that some historical analysis will answer the question. I thank Peter Steinfels for his thoughtful essay.

ARTHUR RIFKIN

Disquiet zone

Peoria, Ill.

To the Editors: All my disquieting feelings of frustrating ambiguity over the issue of pacifism and the "just war theory" were revived when I read Peter Steinfels's article ["Appointment with Hitler," July 12].

On the one hand, it seems to me that if Jesus taught us anything on this issue, it was that his followers should be pacifists. "Blessed are the peacemakers . . . Love your enemies . . . Do good to those who persecute and calumniate you

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. . . Turn the other cheek," etc. These were some of the "hard" sayings that made people turn away from Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane he told Peter to put his dagger away because his cause was not served by that kind of violence. As John McKenzie once wrote: "Jesus taught us how to die, not how to kill." He taught us that there are values worth suffering for and worth dying for, but not worth killing for. He taught us that the value of human life and of the human person is something innate and inalienable.

Jesus did not ignore evil. Living in the real world, he denounced the structural injustice and the social ills of his day; denounced the self-seeking and oppressive exercise of power by religious leaders; championed the cause of the poor and the outcast. Upon occasion he even used a form of violence in resisting evil as when he overturned the moneychangers' tables and drove them out of the temple, teaching us to use at least a nonlethal resistance to evil.

The "just war theory" is not something you will find in the Gospel message. It is a philosophical construct that was introduced into Christian thinking after the church had been incorporated into the political establishment. It was introduced by St. Ambrose who, significantly, was an officer in the Roman Army before he became a bishop. The theory was further promoted by his famous disciple, St. Augustine.

I don't think there has ever been a just war on the basis of this theory because the conditions for a just war have never been met, and modern weapons of destruction, even "conventional" weapons, have made meeting those conditions a moot question. How can you justify the fire-bombing of Hamburg, Dresden, Tokyo, and Osaka where thousands of men, women, and children were burned alive? And now we have two antagonistic superpowers armed to the teeth with awesome nuclear weapons, poised to kill hundreds of millions of people including millions, perhaps, who are ready to declare a "pox" on both houses. It seems to me that no political, economic, or religious ideology can justify such human slaughter.

The article seemed to imply that we entered World War II in order to save the Jews from Hitler's brutality. That is not my memory of events, but since I spent most of the war years in a Japanese camp, I don't know if there was much talk about the plight of the Jews as the war went on. I agree that wars "solve some problems" but solve them in the wrong way, producing, as a result, new problems. I can look back over three quarters of a century; all the wars in that time were fought for economic reasons, for access to markets, raw materials, or cheap labor. I remember when we entered World War I, we were told, to remove the Kaiser and "make the world safe for democracy." But the vengeful, oppressive Treaty of Versailles prepared the way for Hitler. We entered World War II to remove Hitler and protect the "Four Freedoms." But in doing so we produced a strengthened, as well as brutal, Stalin. We were given many reasons for our Vietnam involvement, but the real reason was, again, economics.

In war we are really defending an economic ideology — economic capitalism — more specifically, an American-based multinational capitalism. We have made idols of capitalism and national security, made them absolutes, so that any threat to them justifies military action. In one of his franker moments, John Foster Dulles said: "We have no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, only permanent interests."

I do not know the "master of the spiritual life, William Johnston," but I think he was closer to the truth than Mr. Steinfels is willing to admit. Johnston wrote: "If there is a nuclear war (which God forbid), it will be fought *for money, for oil,* and *for petrodollars*." We are not victims of some inexorable and inanimate historical process; we make history by our decisions and our actions.

LEON SULLIVAN

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To sully the name

Southfield, Mich.

To the Editors: Peter Steinfels's article ["Appointment With Hitler," July 12] could give muddled minds the impression that appeasers and pacifists are one and the same. Lest we forget: Pacifists resist — peacefully and nonviolently, but they do resist. Appeasers do not resist: They bow down and knuckle under. Don't sully the name of pacifism by tarring it with the brush of appeasement.

JAVAN KIENZLE

Macabre comrades

Heidelberg, West Germany

To the Editors: I read with bated breath Peter Steinfels's "Appointment with Hitler" [July 12]. Perhaps the author would be interested in my view of the events that led from the First World War to the Second, and on to the present.

I returned from the war in 1918 with the conviction that the German government, while not the only culprit, was chiefly responsible for that slaughter. I was a pacifist, and my thinking ran along the lines of Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster. I welcomed, with reservations, the change of *si vis pacem, para bellum* to *si vis pacem, para pacem* on the occasion of the Kellogg-Briand Pact.

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But Hitler's criminal plans required a different response. He expressly intended the extermination of the Jews and a new world war. So I regretted that France and Great Britain disarmed, and still consider it their historic guilt.

To my greatest grief, Hitler came to power not by upheaval but by legal means. The Holocaust and the Second World War were perpetrated legally in the name of our people. After Hitler's criminal adventure, instead of a radical change of mind there followed a repression; and instead of a new beginning, a restoration. And, excuse me for saying it, the Americans supported this reinstatement and even advanced it by returning prominent Nazis to high positions.

The scandal of Bitburg was a consequence of that macabre comradeship. I see it as derisive of not only the victims of Auschwitz, but of the Allied soldiers who died battling the Nazis. Bitburg was a blasphemy to their memory, committed by the representatives of the two states and peoples most concerned. As such, it was an especially humiliating effect of the fatal anti-Communist obsession of both West Germany and the United States.

As to nuclear armaments, I dare not judge the conscience of any person, keeping in mind Matthew 7:1. But what the militaries and many politicians are planning and doing, objectively speaking, I consider a millionfold crime, a crime crying to the heavens.

ALFONS BEIL

Surpassing the state

College Park, Md.

To the Editors: Peter Steinfels's article ["Appointment with Hitler," July 12] is published with the subtitle "Confronting the Moral Question of World War II." The author emphasizes the analysis of the moral problems people had to face during World War II, but deemphasizes problems related to today's nuclear armaments. I happen to agree with Brecht that the womb that gave birth to Hitler is still alive; I also feel, however, that World War II is over.

Seldom in history does a situation repeat itself. Steinfels well recognizes that. But he does not seem to give enough importance in his reasoning to the enormous difference in the power of destruction between 1939 and 1985. The difference in the ability to destroy the whole world (and not necessarily deliberately) changes the nature of the problem.

The apparent deadend at which integral pacifism may arrive brings to mind Lincoln's statement that: you can fool all the people some of the time, some of the people all the time, but not all the people all the time. A deep philosophical analysis like the one that Steinfels is attempting should raise the question to Lincoln: "Why not?" The implication in Lincoln's sentence and the answer to the integral pacifist philosophy are the same: there is no rational basis to state that "you cannot fool all the people all the time," nor is there a rational basis to state that only the integral pacifist position can save mankind today. The only basis for the answer is faith. Faith in God that will not permit Hitler to prevail. Faith in God that has created man in his image. This of course does not answer the questions raised by Steinfels and by the integral pacifists. Obviously not everybody has that faith.

Systematic reasoning over the situation of the world in 1940, and over the position that people had to take at that time if concerned about justice and peace, lead to the conclusion that pacifism was not acceptable. Similar reasoning about the situation of the world in 1985 by people equally concerned about justice and peace, leads to the conclusion that "defense," "armaments," "nuclear bombs" and "star wars" are not acceptable.

Militarism and nationalism were the enemy in 1940. They were beaten at their game by civilian people and internationally minded people. Militarism and nationalism are the enemy today, and they cannot be defeated by making fascists out of people.

Historically, the thirteen colonies showed the way to live together: with a written piece of paper, and authorities with power to make decisions to be accepted by everybody.

Philosophically, that is in the best tradition of Catholicism. It seems that the time has come to concentrate our attention on the relationship between the nation state and the international community, and accept the jurisdiction of the international community over the national states. Then our discussions on pacifism and militarism will fall within a framework of thinking in which they will have consistent meaning.

A. J. DURELLI

Professor Emeritus, Catholic University

A telling absence?

St. Petersburg, Fla.

To the Editors: About John Paul II's logic ["The Two Popes of the Lowlands," June 21], so "there were no women present at the Last Supper." If that tells against the ordination of women, what can we conclude from the dogma that there were no men present at the Annunciation?

GERARD HINRICHS

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